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C. R. Anderson

The Tristan and Iseult Story

THE TRISTAN AND ISEULT STORY; WITH SPECIAL EMPHASIS ON ITS DEVELOPMENT AFTER THE SAGA STAGE

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I HEREBY RECOMMEND THAT THE THESIS PREPARED UNDER MY SUPERVISION BY C. R. Anderson

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THE TRISTAN AND ISEULT STORY:
WITH SPECIAL EMPHASIS ON ITS DEVELOPMENT AFTER THE SAGA STAGE.

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I.

THE EARLY GROWTH OF THE TRISTAN AND ISEULT STORY.

The Tristan and Iseult legend has often been pronounced the most poetical and poignant love story in literature. To the twentieth century reader, accustomed as he is to the conventions of the modern age, this assertion is frequently looked upon as extremely far-fetched. The blameless character of the lovers as emphasized in literature is largely attributed to poetic license, and most readers are prone to accept such versions as Tennyson's without further examination of the subject. Frequently the ordinary reader is not aware that there are earlier and different versions of the Tristan and Iseult story and hence is not struck by the incongruity of the modern stories.

It is the purpose of this essay to endeavor to refute the charge of infamy which has attached itself to the old legend through the works of modern writers. Inasmuch as the work of enlightenment is an important factor in this problem, we shall first present the Tristan and Iseult legend in its general relation to Arthurian tradition, which necessitates a general account of the story. In this field the writer is limited to translations and to the works of various scholars who have had access to original manuscripts.

The next step will be a consideration of love, both ideal and conventional, as reflected in the oldest legends and their sources, and in other pre-Malory literature, with especial attention to the treatment of unlawful love. From here we shall trace the growth or rather degeneracy, of the story in Malory, and, finally, we shall

study the more modern conception as typified in Tennyson.

For a long time the true history and ideals of that world which produced material for Arthurian literature was shrouded in a dark cloud of mystery. It was not until comparatively modern scholarship attacked the question that any very tangible results were obtained. While all the problems connected with the Arthurian Cycle have not yet been solved, modern scholars have done much toward unraveling the tangled threads of its early literature. This literature, grouped under the general term Arthurian Tradition, forms a subject of never ending study. The name of Arthur, whether historical or mythical, seems to possess hypnotic qualities. It is the signal for the raising of the curtain revealing a wonderful stage. Brave knights and fair ladies cross and recross this stage. We seem to hear the noise of battle as horses and riders meet in combat, and the clank of swords against metal armor as knights joust for the honor of their ladies.

For out of the chaos of the Dark Ages, governed by feudalism and catholicism, came a new virtue. First there was loyalty to God and to the overlord. Later there was added the loyalty to woman, and all united to form the chivalric ideal which has inspired writers in every century. Chivalry was the golden dream which possessed mediaeval men and women, ennobling their lives and aspirations. It was as different from the antique form of feudalism as the Ideal is different from the Real. Feudal scenes show a gloomy picture of oppression and general depravity. Loyalty to the overlord was decidedly materialistic; the devotion to chivalry, idealistic. The essence of chivalry was unselfishness. The knight constantly subordinated desire for material gain to the ideal of service for oth-

ers -- his lord, lady, or country, and later religion.

The age of chivalry was one of fancy and invention. The creative instinct and the penetration into nature as shown by the writers of this age is remarkable when we consider that they were entering an unexplored field. These early writers were denied the benefits which are derived from experience and tradition. The few meagre sources, such as Nennius' History, to which they had access were brief and uncomprehended. Groping after a new ideal of expression, shut off from any historical past by a black wall of ignorance, the productions of the age may truly be said to have been an original expression of contemporary life. Even the myths and fairy tales that were recounted by wandering minstrels are important as showing the trend of mediaeval minds. It was the production of a finished article from a new and untouched piece of cloth, and to say that the tailoring was exquisite is no exaggeration.

One of the most interesting developments of the age of chivalry, with its social idealism and its artistic inventiveness, was the literature of hero worship. Throughout the ages every country has at some time had a great hero whose deeds, either real or fictitious, have been perpetuated for the glory of his native land. The prestige of these heroes has been circulated in proportion to their worth until many of them became world wide figures. Beowulf fought his way over a dragon infested route to a place of foremost prominence. Later Charlemagne, in a somewhat more modern manner, gained renown even in foreign countries by his mighty strength as a leader and as a conqueror. The recital of the deeds of famous heroes might be continued to almost any length.

The greatest of all the hero cycles is centered in King Arthur. Coming after Charlemagne and surpassing him in valorous deeds, Arthur and his knights have become the scintillating lights of the age of chivalry, not only in English speaking countries, but also in foreign lands, especially in France. This prominent interest in Arthurian Tradition which we find in France may be attributed partly to the fact that much of the literature produced in the creative epoch of Arthurian tradition was written in French. However the background is purely English. The chief source of later writers was Geoffrey's History which was unmistakably English. But antedating Geoffrey are the old mythical Celtic tales, in which we can recognize the real origin of the Arthurian Tradition.

It was not until the twelfth century that Arthur and his knights first became the central figures in this greatest romantic cycle. Despite the fairy tales which went hand in hand with this early literature, the heroes were men of their day. To casual modern readers, these tales seem exaggerated and wholly unreal. It is only after careful study that we discover how much they have to teach us about the mediaeval conception of love and honor and the ideals of the age of chivalry.

A precursory survey of this early literature merely shows a large number of individual units without any common bond of union, and it is only after a careful study that we discover the relation of this early work to a system of progressive literature working in collaboration with an ideal. The reader who expects to find distinct character development portrayed in each tale will be disappointed, for the early writers did not work so swiftly. A character underwent little change during the progress of a single tale, and it is

not until another writer portrays the same person in an entirely new story that we find any appreciable change in that character. This fact is seen in following any character through the cycle. Perhaps the best known example of this gradual changing in character is in the treatment of Gawain. In the early stories, Gawain is Arthur's right hand man, the peer of all knights, and the model of courtesy. From this exalted pedestal he descends until in the later works Gawain is described as a base, lustful, wholly undesirable character.

Even Arthur loses his place of preeminence in later literature. From being the militant and all powerful character whose prowess established the fame of the Round Table, he is relegated to a position of mere nominal supremacy. He becomes the center of a group of knights any one of whom is his equal in power and who alternate in usurping most of the story. Percival gradually rises from a somewhat licentious knight to the admirable knight who achieves the quest of the Holy Grail.

Thus the characters vacillate, some improving, some degenerating, as the sun of approval or disapproval shines upon them. Much of the change may doubtless be attributed to the temperament of the various authors. For example, Gottfried was interested only in telling a story in the best literary style possible, while Chretien sought to portray ideals and conventions of the age in which he wrote. Malory wrote with an ideal of nationalism for his guiding star, while Tennyson sought to teach a moral lesson. It is not strange, then, that various stories should change as they are moulded and remoulded to suit the needs of new writers in different ages.

The life itself of the various ages is largely responsible for many changes that are found in different legends. Minstrels

sprang up who changed Epic into Romance, and who circulated the various legends, often giving them native touches even as scholars of the renaissance spread learning. It is doubtless by this method that many of the heroes became attached to Arthur's court.

Among those early heroes who were not at first connected with Arthur's court, is Tristan. Recent studies have made it clear that the Tristan legend is probably earlier than the Arthurian Romances and was doubtless circulated as a story in itself in the early ages. Later we find this legend becoming more and more attached to Arthurian tradition, and Tristan soon becomes a bona fide member of Arthur's court. Eilhart does not mention the existence of the Round Table, and the only allusion to Arthurian Romance found in Gottfried's version is a brief statement in the description of the lovers in the forest:

"Even good King Arthur never held at his court a feast that might have brought them greater joy and refreshment... Their love was their high feast which brought them a thousand times daily the joy of Arthur's Round Table." [1]

The dates and sources for the various early versions of the Tristan and Iseult legend are necessarily vague, and the following summary will set forth only those which seem to be supported by consensus of opinion.

The creative epoch in Arthurian literature was during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, and it was at this time that we find the Tristan and Iseult legend rising to a place of prominence. The full value of Arthurian stories as poetic and romantic matter and their possibilities of adaptation as ideal tales of chivalry

1 Gottfried: Tristan and Iseult. Vol.II,p.111-12.

was first perceived in France, or by writers who used the French language. In the regular Arthurian literature we have Wace's Chronicles, Layamon's Brut, and Chretiens' contributions affording a French atmosphere to English legend. Soon the French writers turned to Romance, and we find Tristan, Lancelot, and Percival diverting attention from Arthur.

About 1150 is the date commonly agreed upon for Beroul's version of the Tristan and Iseult story, which was first produced in French. This furnished the model for the German version of Eilhart von Oberge, which is assigned the date of c.1190. A little later than Beroul, yet so near that he might be termed his running mate, was Thomas, another French writer, who wrote c 1170. The genius of Thomas is shown in his lack of effort, or his simplicity of style.[1] He uses little ornament or emphasis, presenting his story in a simple, appealing manner. It is this version that Gottfried von Strassburg uses as his model, and applying his genius as a word painter to Thomas' simple story, he has given us the most beautiful version of the Tristan and Iseult legend that we possess. It is upon this work as translated by Miss Weston that I have principally based my study.[2]

The first stage of the Tristan legend was probably modelled after the typical Celtic story of conflicting loves, and doubtless ended when the lovers returned from the forest. The ending of such a version is preserved in the French prose romance in which Mark kills Tristan with a spear in the presence of Iseult.[3] The

1. W. P. Ker: Epic and Romance. p. 344.
2. Gottfried's version goes only to the introduction of the second Iseult. Miss Weston's translation continued from Gottfried's ending, giving us the sail episode which she has taken from Heinrich's version.
3. Cambridge History of English Literature, Vol.I, p.304.

second stage was probably the early French romance modifying the first period of development so as to meet the requirements of the French audiences. From this we pass to the form of the story which we find in such writers as Gottfried, and which gives us a fuller account of the birth of Tristan, a continuation of incidents illustrating the doctrine of courtly love, and various new endings.

In these later forms of the story we have a distinct French background, even as the monks gave a cloister background to the later Arthurian material. The French civilization of the period contributed new ideas and ideals. Those pertaining to the conventional system of courtly love we may observe in many incidents, e.g. that which tells of the anger of Iseult toward Tristan when she thought that he refused to stop when commanded to do so in her name, and later the story of her penance in the hair shirt.[1] Such passages immediately recall the questions and the penalties of the old French courts of love[2].

However, as has been pointed out by prominent scholars, the general motif and action of the Tristan and Iseult story continues to exhibit even in later versions a marked similarity to ancient Celtic legends. Lacking a Christian coloring, and only faintly touched, as compared with tales of more recent development such as Lancelot, Erec and Enid, or Cliges, by the artificial conventions of chivalry, the legend of Tristan bears every mark of a remote pagan and Celtic origin. This is especially true in its presentation of passion. Nowhere do we have a more striking presentation of natural and overpowering passion, which makes the story of

1. Eilhart: Tristan and Iseult. Vol. I, pp 49
2. W. G. Dodd: Courtly Love in Chaucer and Gower. p.1

Tristan and Iseult, in tragic interest and pathos, second to none of the great love tales of the world.

Old Celtic tales show a love of nature, a delight in beauty, color, and harmony which is apparent in Tristan. In Ireland, particularly, is found a spiritual beauty, a passion for self-sacrifice, which was unknown in Wales or Brittany. The Irish heroes of these early tales are frequently found renouncing advantages, worldly honor, and life itself at the bidding of some moral impulse.[1] This type of knight errantry, which may be said to be known only to students, preceded the chivalry of Chretien's age, and is the real basis of Arthurian tradition.

Even Kilwch and Olwen with its many improbabilities shows an affiliation of Arthurian tradition with Celtic epic. A code of honor is apparent even though it is of a pre-Christian nature. Later stories show a chivalrous code grafted on.[2] Recent scholars have pointed out a basis in older legends for many of Geoffrey's tales, although they are written in mediaeval style. For example, Uther's amour for Igerne might well be based on the folk-tale appearing in the classic story of Jupiter and Alcmena, and for which there is a close parallel in the Kathasaritsagara.[3]

Many analogies have been drawn showing the similarity between the Tristan and Iseult story and various Celtic legends. In one Welsh legend, Tristan appears under the name of Drystan, son of Tallwch, a mythical hero, and is represented as the nephew and swineherd of Mark who protects his master's swine when Arthur attempts to secure them. In all these earliest poetical versions, Mark is King

1. M. I. Erbutt: Hero Myths and Legends of the British Race p.156
2. V. D. Scudder: Le Morte D'Arthur and Its Sources. p.14.
3. Robert Huntington Fletcher: Arthurian Material in the Chronicles Vol. X, p.90.

of Cornwall, although he is given various characteristics which will be discussed later. Iseult, the primal hero, is a daughter of Ireland, while Iseult of the White Hands is a princess of Brittany.

As one scholar has pointed out, there is a marked similarity between the Tristan story and the old Celtic legend of Diarmaid and Grainne, both as a whole and in detail. This analogue is of sufficient interest to warrant a discussion of it in some detail. The story of Diarmaid and Grainne is as follows:

Diarmaid, the nephew of Finn, an Irish chieftain, is one of his chief's closest friends and most trusted warriors. Grainne, the daughter of Cormac the high king of Ireland, is Finn's unwilling wife. Diarmaid is driven by a strange fatality to take away the wife of his friend and king. He is represented as possessing a 'love-spot' which makes him irresistible to any woman who sees it. Grainne sees this spot and is immediately consumed with love for Diarmaid. She had recourse to the expedient of putting a 'geis' upon Diarmaid, which made it necessary for him to go with her. The lovers are thus marked by a fate which they cannot gainsay.

The couple, having escaped to the forest, are tracked like wild beasts. Unconsious of hardship and privation, they are sustained by means of their love. On this escapade, Diarmaid remembers his duty to his chief and for a long time does not make a wife of Grainne. In order to assure the followers of their innocence, Diarmaid leaves uncooked meat behind him at every resting place. At night, he places a stone between their beds. During the life in the forest we have incidents such as the "splashing water", the "harp and the rote", in which Diarmaid puts Grainne up as a stake at dice and loses her for a short time. They are finally lured back to court by false promises and Diarmaid is treacherously

slain.[1]

In both the Tristan and the Diarmaid story we find the tragic element of conflicting loyalties -- to love and to friend. Diarmaid, the prototype of Tristan, struggles like him between his sense of duty to his chief and his overpowering love for his lady. In the more modern Arthurian literature we have this same conflict of loyalties in the Modred, Guenevere, and Arthur triangle, and later in the relations of Arthur, Lancelot, and Guenevere.

In Diarmaid and Grainne, Grainne taunts the lover with not being as bold as the water that splashes on her thigh. This incident is found in almost identically the same form in Gottfried's version of Tristan and Iseult. Here, however, the woman is Iseult of Brittany rather than the heroine, but the motif of loyalty is the same. In the former, the incident is an important link which binds the hero to his fate, while in the latter it is merely a bit of narrative technique used to reveal a secret. Thus we see the application of an old theme to a new purpose.

The "Separating Sword" incident found in Tristan and Iseult has its parallel in the Diarmaid and Grainne legend. In some versions Diarmaid makes his bed at a distance from Grainne, while in others he places a stone between them. It is scarcely a leap of imagination to think of Tristan, the hero of a more modern age, employing his keen sword in imitation of his earlier prototype who had made use of the primitive stone. Both the Beroul and the Thomas branches of the legend contain this incident although none of them give a good explanation. Gottfried gives the better treatment in emotional appeal, but he, too, seems to lack motivation.

1. This synopsis is gathered from Miss Schoepperle's discussion Tristan and Iseult. Vol. II, p. 395-445.

The harp incident also has its parallels in older Celtic legends. In Tristan and Iseult, an Irish knight, who has been in love with Iseult before she left Ireland, came to the court of Mark carrying a lute. After eating, the musicians began to play, but the stranger knight held aloof with a disdainful air. After having been urged to play for some time,he promises to do so on condition that Mark will reward him. The king, not suspecting treachery, promises him anything that he desires, whereupon the stranger plays wondrously well. At the conclusion of his performance, he claims Iseult as his prize. Bound by laws of chivalry, the king must fulfillhis promise. Tristan returns, pursues the knight, and, chiefly by means of his harp, regains Iseult.[1]

In Diarmaid and Grainne we have an incident in which a stranger comes to the cave where the exiles are dwelling. The men engage at throwing dice and the stranger wins every thing from Diarmaid. Finally he agrees to place Grainne as a stake and again loses, whereby the stranger becomes the possessor of Grainne. Diarmaid leaves the cave but later returns and rescues Grainne from her captor.

Following the old custom, which was later incorporated into the laws of chivalry, the promise is always made before the request. Fidelity to one's plighted word as an underlying motif is frequently met with in these early tales. Heroes made promises rashly and consequently got themselves in to sore trouble. A knight's promise once given was regarded as sacred and must be fulfilled even though it meant losing his life. In the later story of Gawain and the Green Knight, Gawain searched long for the Green

1. Gottfried: Tristan and Iseult. Vol.II, pp33-40

Knight so that he might redeem his word even though he knew that it meant his own death.

The Stag Hunt of the Diarmaid story is also part of the stock in trade of Celtic literature and it is usually connected with mystic elements. The stag,which is the object of the hunt is frequently a camouflaged spirit. The mysterious Merlin sometimes assumes the shape of a stag, in which form he is always marked by a white forefoot. Disastrous circumstances usually accompany a stag hunt. In Lanzelet, Arthur and his court are hunting the white stag when Guenevere is carried off by Valerin to his underworld dwelling.[1] In the Tristan of Gottfried, it is in the chase of the white stag, "large as a horse", that Mark and his huntsmen come upon the 'minnegrotte' and surprise the lovers in their slumbers. In the stories of Fiana, or the Ossianic Cycle, the stag hunt is prominent.[2]

Tristan's trip to Ireland in order to be healed of the wound he received in the Morholt combet is likewise of a primitive nature. According to the old custom, he was first isolated in a hut until his wound should heal. Gottfried furnished a more plausible motivation by saying that it was necessary to remove him to an isolated hut because of the stench from the poisoned wound.

It was a common belief among these primitive people that a wound established some relation between the victim and the person or weapon inflicting it.[3] They believed that the healing of such a

1. J. L. Weston: Legend of Sir Perceval. Vol.II, p.112.
2. Ibid. "In the stories of the Fianna, or "Ossianic" cycle the mystic stag hunt plays an extraordinarily prominent role. A popular tradition alive today states that the chase lasted for five and thirty years. Lady Gregory's book Gods and Fighting Men abounds in incidents of this kind." p. 112.
3. Schoepperle: Tristan and Isolt. Vol. II, p 386.

wound could be accomplished only by the person who inflicted it, some specified person, or by the instrument with which it was inflicted. Frequently we find that only a touch was necessary to heal, but to gain that coveted touch meant traveling a difficult road. In one Irish tale a man turns himself into a cow so as to be touched by a certain woman and hence healed. Peasants, when they cut themselves with their scythes, wrapped the blades with as much care as they did the wound, thinking that keeping the blade bright and clean would aid in the healing of their injury. This belief may be said to have held through the French Romances, for in the early Grail legends we find the Fisher King wounded in such a manner that only the one lance may cure him.[1]

Eilhart and Gottfried differ in their methods of bringing together Tristan and Queen Iseult of Ireland, who is to heal him, although both are based on the healing tradition discussed above. Eilhart, with a marked absence of motivation, has Tristan turned loose in a rudderless boat and cast up on the Irish shore to insure the healing by Morholt's sister in accordance with the healing tradition. Eilhart tells us that no one but the Queen has the power to heal him, but Tristan does not know this. The ride in a rudderless boat, in Celtic literature, is usually done as a penance.[2]

In Gottfried we have better motivation. Here Morholt, after giving Tristan his wound, tells him that only his sister, Queen Iseult, can cure him and offers to take him to her if he will withdraw from the combat. Because of this information, Tristan is able to go in state to within a short distance of the Irish coast.

1. A. C. L. Brown: The Bleeding Lance. Vol. XXV, p.21.
2. Schoepperle: Tristan and Isolt. Vol. II, p. 375.

He orders his comrade to cast him adrift in a rudderless boat and to return to Cornwall. In both instances Tristan goes to the court in disguise and is unknowingly healed by his enemy, seemingly following very closely the primitive healing tradition which we have noted above.

It is interesting to note the various threads of similarity running through these old legends. The motivation seems to follow a more or less well defined pathway. Like a series of columns rising out of turbulent waters, yet based on the same foundation, so are many of the incidents found in the different versions of the Tristan and Iseult story. Although frequently the details are altered, when one seeks beneath the dark waters of obscurity, it is discovered that the foundation is the same.

As an example of this general similarity might be cited the conditions in the King's quest for a bride. In practically every legend involving a King's search for a bride there may be traced five general principles which are observed.[1] The King first determines to seek a wife, which may be done either by himself or by proxy, usually the latter. In the Tristan and Iseult story, Tristan is to perform this duty for his uncle.

There must be a motive for this determination to seek a bride, which is usually a sincere desire to marry, or the king is influenced by others. In this latter case, the motive of the adviser is usually the death of the hero. This is well brought out in the case of King Mark. At no time does he really wish to marry, but he is strongly influenced by his nobles, who, disliking Tristan, wish Mark to marry and leave another heir. In later versions their

1. This discussion of the King's quest for a bride was gleaned, chiefly, from class work in Miss Schoepperle's Arthurian Tradition course.

hatred for Tristan is of a more decided nature, and they urge Mark to send him to Ireland after the fair Iseult, because they are certain that he will be killed while performing the mission.

The King must choose a princess, either by having a clew to her identity or merely by report. We have both of these ideas as motivations in the Eilhart and Gottfried versions respectively. Eilhart gives us the more primitive motivation in which he has a swallow bring a beautiful hair to the court of Mark, who immediately swears that he will marry only the woman from whose head came the hair. Tristan, who had not seen Iseult when he was healed, then sets out on the quest with only luck as a guide. Gottfried works this situation out better by permitting Tristan to see Iseult when he was healed. Tristan's report of her wondrous beauty is also the motif which causes Mark to choose her as his prospective bride.

If the hero does not have definite directions for his journey, he is usually aided by various folklore methods, the favorite one being that he is guided by animals that are bound by friendship. The hero rescues some animal that is in dire distress, which then becomes his vassal for life, always appearing when its assistance is needed by the hero.[1]

Finally the hero must win the Princess, either by ruse, violence, or service. Tristan's success in winning Iseult is rather a union of ruse and service. He gains admittance to Ireland under disguise, saves the country from the ravages of a dragon and is rewarded with the Princess, thus fulfilling his mission.

1. Innumerable instances might be cited showing the loyalty of animals to the hero. There is a typical example in Kilwch and Olwen in which Kilwch uses many of his animal friends in his attempt to perform all the tasks that were assigned to him be-

The evidence of analogues proves the indebtedness of the Tristan and Iseult story to old Celtic legends. The general treatment of the tragic element of conflicting loyalties has been shown in various situation. Allusions to primitive ideals and conventions have been made so as to better show the later change. A few comparisons have been made between the early writers which will tend to place each in his respective niche and illustrate various contributions to the Tristand and Iseult legend.

I shall now proceed to a consideration of the more centralized theme of love as portrayed in pre-Malory literature.

fore winning Olwen. The Mabinogion. pp. 123-5.

II.

THE CONCEPTION OF LOVE BEFORE MALORY

My discussion thus far has been of a general nature. I shall now consider the subject of love, especially unlawful love, as presented in the older legends, and then trace it through the later romances of chivalry such as Cliges, Lancelot, and Yvian. I shall endeavor to show how, during the period of romance represented by Chretien, the subject of love was exploited by the poets, and how the conception of love degenerated even from the primitive state portrayed in the earlier Tristan and Iseult stories.

Although French literature is commonly considered as the pioneer in the field of romantic literature, we are able to discern a distinct parallel for French romanticism, or rather its source, in old Celtic myths and legends. Ireland possessed in the tenth century a literature of romantic love of a depth and refinement of sentiment of which France had not dreamed or was not to dream for over another century.[1] In these old tales we see the conflict between the passion of lovers and the existing social order is plainly distinguishable in such stories as Deirdre and Naisi. In Liadain and Curithir, Ailill and Etain, or Diarmaid and Grainne we find the loyalty to friend and woman, and the struggle between love and conscience portrayed as clearly as in the twentieth century.[2]

1. Gertrude Schoepperle: Tristan and Iseult. Vol.II,p.465.
2. Miss Schoepperle presents a formidiable array of Irish tales which demonstrate the conflict of various elements in this early time. In the "Exile of the Sons of Usnech", the story of Deirdre and Naisi, we see the primitive passion of love in conflict with the social order. (Vol. II,p 545) The following story is a brief synopsis of the story:

In this early age, the wife was considered as the property of the husband, and she was treated as any other piece of property which could be disposed of as the owner saw fit. In the case of adultery, the husband could kill the thief and also his wife if he wished to sacrifice his property. Moral consideration was always subordinated to property right. Adultery is a common motif in early romance. Usually the husband is indulgent to an unfaithful wife, as in the case of Mark prior to Malory. The love of a trusted vassal for the lady is one of the most commonly used motifs in supplying the complicating machinery of the plot.

1. (continued)

"It had been prophesied that Deirdre would bring woe to the warriors of Ulster, but despite this prophesy Conor, the king, has her set aside as his wife, and she is reared away from civilization. Through the machinations of the witch, Levorcham, she learns of Naisi, son of Usnech, and falls in love with him. After some hesitancy, Naisi is forced to yield and there follows a long period of exile in which Naisi and his followers are constantly harassed by the forces of Conor. Naisi is finally induced to return to court where he is treacherously slain, Dierdre becomes the wife of Conor but soon kills herself by dashing her head against a stone."

In the story of "Liadain and Curithir", we have love for a girl who has taken the vows. Here is portrayed the struggle of love and conscience. (Vol. II, pp 553-560.)

The story of Ailill and Etain presents the tragedy of transgression of moral law. It is the struggle between the passion for the woman and loyalty for her husband.

"Eochaid had sent his men out to procure the most beautiful woman in Ireland for his bride. He had two brothers, Eochaid Fedlech and Ailill Anguba. When Etain was brought to court, Ailill immediately falls in love with her. Because of this great love he wastes away in sickness, always refusing to confess the cause of his illness. Eochaid has occasion to leave for a short time and leaves instructions with Etain that everything possible shall be done for Ailill during his absence. While Etain remains near him, Ailill becomes better until he is almost cured. He makes a tryst with her and fails to keep it. This happens three times. Finally it develops that the spirit which has made him fall in love with her has taken away his desire so that her honor might be spared."(Vol.II, pp 560-564)

The source of the love between vassal and lady varied in the different stories. Sometines their love was caused by supernatural means which they were unable to resist. In Diarmaid and Grainne, the passion of the lovers was caused by a love spot or 'geis". As creativeness in literature advanced, more plausible methods were evolved for causing the great passion between lovers which is demonstrated in the story of Tristan and Iseult.

In all the different versions of the Tristan and Iseult story, the great unchangeable love of the hero and heroine has been caused by a magic love potion, which they unknowingly drank while going from Ireland to Cornwall. Although assuming different attributes in the various versions, the basic complications remain the same. In the earliest stories the strength of the potion was limited to four years, after which the love of Tristan and Iseult waned and Iseult went back to the court as the Queen of Mark. In the early years of their love, the potion dominates the lovers to such a degree that they become indifferent to conventionality and to the sinfulness of their love. These early writers empahsize the fact that the lovers are not responsible for their conduct. Even Mark acknowledges the power of the potion after the death of the lovers.[1]

There is no doubt that the early tellers of the story had a firm belief in the fatal power of the love potion, and that they practically regarded the lovers as blameless. Gottfried gives an admirable example of this conception in the incident of the red-hot

The story of Diarmaid and Grainne we have already discussed

These stories show a rather high development of tragedy in this early time.

1. Gertrude Schoepperle: Tristan and Iseult. Vol. II, 448.

irons. Mark requires Iseult to swear that her relations with Tristan have been innocent, after which she must grasp the red-hot irons. On the day of the ceremony, Tristan, disguised as a Palmer, meets the boat and carries Iseult to the shore. He falls and lies for a moment by her side, after which Iseult swears that only Mark and the Palmer have ever been by her side. Then Iseult grasps the hot irons and is not burned. Thus even the Deity winks at the trickery of the lovers.[1]

In the earliest stories, the power of the potion was limited to four years. Later writers, however, influenced by chivalrous ideals of love, thought that such a love as existed between Tristan and Iseult should be of an everlasting nature. Consequently the power of the potion was extended to cover the entire life of the lovers, which, of course, added to the tragic nature of the story. The potion became a symbol of the supremacy of the God of Love, Amour, which the age was just beginning to worship. The illicit relations,which had before been forbidden even by the primitive society of the old Celts, now became sanctioned by the best of society. All law was superseded by the one great law of love. Love became more powerful than honor in the eyes of the world. 'Amour' reighned supreme as a divinity which was to be worshiped and blessed. Lovers accepted their fate as unavoidable and acknowledged the God of Love as their Master. Gottfried gives a good presentation of this deified love:

1. Gottfried: Tristan and Iseult. Vol. II. p 9

"When Tristan and Iseult had drunk of the potion, Love, who never resteth but besetteth all hearts, crept softly into the hearts of the twain and ere they were ware of it, she had planted her banner of conquest therein, and brought them under her rule. They were one and undivided who but now were twain and at enmity."[1]

The complete supremacy of Amour is well portrayed in Tristan and Iseult. Love is stronger than loyalty, duty, ambition, fear, or pity. Tristan continually struggles against his love because of his loyalty to his uncle, but he is always conscious of fighting a losing battle. The God of Love has such complete control over Tristan and Iseult that they will undergo any sacrifice for the sake of Amour. With all its apparent immorality, the love of Tristan and Iseult is not degrading for it is a love of sacrifices, and such a love must necessarily occupy a high plane.

An excellent example of this love of sacrifices is when Tristan sends Iseult the little dog, Petit-Crui, whose tinkling bell drives away all sorrow. Iseult, because of her unselfish love, is unwilling to be happy while her lover suffers and she casts the bell into the sea.[2] When Iseult is told that Tristan cannot sleep because of his inability to see her, we are touched by her reply. As a mother will provide everything for the comfort of her loved ones, Iseult sends her magic pillow for the comfort of Tristan, disregarding her personal discomfort which will result from her self-sacrifice.

"You shall take the pillow that I lay under my head when my longing for Tristan is so great that I cannot sleep. You know the power of that pillow. Lay it under his head and he will sleep soundly all the night."[3]

1. Gottfried: Tristan and Iseult. Vol.II. p 9.
2. Ibid p 103
3. Eilhart: Tristan and Iseult. Vol. I. p 46.

When Tristan lies upon his deathbed, he sends for Iseult to come to him. Her lack of hesitancy in hastening to his bedside and her devotion even unto death furnishes one of the finest examples of self sacrificing love that is to be found in literature.[1] It is such human touches as these that have brought Tristan and Iseult through the ages as examples of the true lovers.

Because Tristan and Iseult continually struggle against their overpowering love, the sins of the lovers must in all justice be treated with leniency. They inwardly suffer for their loss of honor and it is with great mental anguish that they are disloyal to their friends. Gottfried gives us an admirable picture of Tristan's struggles against avowing his love just after he had drunk the potion:

"There was a strife within him forever as he looked on Iseult, and love stirred his heart and soul, then did honor draw him back. Yet he must needs follow love for his liege lady was she, and in sooth she wounded him more sorely than did his honor and faith to his uncle, though they strove hard for the mastery."[2]

Tristan's honor and respect for his uncle, Mark, adds much to the human appeal of the story. The character of Mark is one of the most varied in the entire legend, but it is not until Malory's version that he actually becomes loathsome. The effort of the later writers to rationalize the story has been successful chiefly at the expense of Mark, whom they ususlly pictured as the cowardly, revengeful uncle, thus furnishing a partial excuse for the action of the lovers. By this means they sought to provide a motif for Tris-

1. Gottfried: Tristan and Iseult. pp 152-5
   Miss Weston adds the sail episode to Gottfried's version which she condenses from the version of Heinrich von Freiberg, one of Gottfried's continuators.
2. Ibid Vol. II, p 11.

tan's so-called disloyalty, not recognizing love as the great impelling force as did those who recounted the older versions.

Eilhart clearly defines the character of Mark, who is represented as the paternal uncle of a somewhat primitive age. He is long in being convinced of Tristan's guilt, but he is then unrelenting. His desire for the cruelest punishment which could be devised is characteristic of primitive conditions.[1]

Thomas' characterization of Mark is not as clear cut as that of Eilhart. He has a tendency to blur the character, making him appear more vacillating and inconsistent, now suspicious and now foolishly trustful.[2]

The first part of the story prepares for the last contrast. Mark as a kind uncle, even though not as a wonderful warrior, commands our respect. His grief at seeing Tristan enter the lists against the dreaded Morholt, a combat which seemed certain death, holds an emotional appeal even today.[3] Mark's refusal to marry while Tristan lived portrays the sincerest relations between them. Hence it is apparent that the tragedy of Tristan and Iseult is not merely in the conflict of human passions with the laws of society, or moral law. It rises beyond this to a tragedy of outraged friendship.

Thus far I have followed the theme of love as it occurred in the early saga stage and then in its more connected and centralized form as found in the Tristan and Iseult legend. Malory is the next writer of importance who utilizes the Tristan and Iseult tale,

1. Eilhart: Tristan and Iseult. Vol. II. p 457.
When Mark is convinced of the guilt of Tristan and Iseult he can scarcely wait till dawn to wreak the worst punichment that he can devise -- breaking on a wheel for Tristan and burning for Iseult. When a leper suggests that life with his band would be more horrible for Iseult than burning, Mark does not hesitate to give her over to this worse fate. He even endeavors to take revenge on Tristan's dog.

but in order to comprehend the changes which are made in the Morte d'Arthur it is necessary to understand the conception of love as realized by the writers in the age preceding Malory.

With the sage stage as a basis, literature approaches the period of pure romanticism where chivalry and courtly love predominate. Knights lose their epic minuteness of detail and become abstract embodiments of the chivalrous ideal. The institution of chivalry was a powerful element in the formation of character and manners. The intellectual activity and curiosity of the aristocracy became greater than before and found expression in fantastic and ingenious ways. The conventional code of morals and conduct became more complex and artificial. Literary expression sought new forms and the direct realistic narrative of former years become overlaid with conceits and ornaments.

This was a time when men carried their lives in their hands. Elaborate rules governed everyday life and the true knight would never break the rules of the game or be faithless to word or to

2. Gottfried: Tristan and Iseult. Vol. II, p 51.

3. In Eilhart's version, Morholt accompanies his message with the usual offer to prove his right to the demanded tribute by single or general combat. Mark performs all negiotations in person, consenting to Tristan's demand to meet Morholt only after much argument. He arms Tristan himself and parts from him with great sorrow.

In Thomas, Tristan personally denies the tribute and offers the challenge in person. Here the sorrow of Mark is described in more detail.

Miss Weston suggests an interesting discussion of Morholt:

"It has been suggested that this redoubtable champion of Ireland was, in the first instance, a sea monster, and that his name was a compound of the Celtic Mor--the sea. The prose version calls him 'le Morhout'. The fact of his close relation with the fair Queen of Ireland, famous for her beauty, seems, however, to militate against this theory. Professor Golther suggests that the name is derived from the German 'Mor-Walt', Rule of the Moor or Marsh. This would account for the definite article. Weston Tristan and Iseult. Vol.I, p 127.

friend. Knights went forth from their own court and immediately met with miraculous experiences. The wandering knight might challenge the lord of any castle and if he succeeded in overcoming him, could make him his vassal and take possession of all his court. Throughout the combat there might be many of the lord's servants present but they did not think of helping their master because it would be an infringement of the laws of chivalry. On this simple basis of gallantry and good faith was built up a code of fine courtesies. The truth and integrity contained therein may still teach a valuable lesson.

In trying to understand the ideal of courtly love we cannot do better than to turn to Chretien de Troyes, who presents a progressive conception of love as it grew during the chivalrous age. In Enid Chretien places chivalry above love, but it is not long until this conception changes and in Cliges the man and woman occupy almost equal positions. In Cliges we have much subtle theorizing about love. Manners are refined and the ladies are always treated with deference. In this story love is represented as a resistless deity which teaches fear and honor. The cause of love is beauty which enters the eye and wounds the heart. In Cliges, the love of both sexes is equally portrayed and the end of the passion is supposed to be a true marriage. Cliges, both because of its similarity and its direct reference to the Tristan story, is of especial interest in a study of the latter story.

The plot of the story is based around the affection of a young knight for the queen of his uncle. The uncle is depicted not as a friend but as an injurer of the hero, for he has broken an oath binding him to celibacy. Thus, in taking the bride, Cliges is

represented as enforcing his right. The lovers admit their passion, but the moral sense of neither will consent to the secret alliance approved in the Tristan legend. Fenice considers it a shame to belong to one person in the sight of the world and to another in private allegiance, a disgrace to which she declares she will never submit. By the expedient of a feigned death the lady comes into possession of her lover.

In Cliges , love is a teacher whose lessons are purely noble and whose discipline is to be accepted without a murmur, no matter how drastic. Although love is supreme, the sexes are placed on a plane of equality, and love as an impulse is refined to an art. Yet the theme of Cliges is not nearly so tragic as that of Tristan. Chretien's tale is a comedy inasmuch as it ends happily. The lovers handle broken faith as the jester wields his wooden sword. They only try to keep their sin hidden from the eyes of the world. Morality is subordinated to convention. Hence it seems apparent to the student of the Tristan story that despite the more primitive conventions, the real morality of the story is far above that of Cliges. Tristan and Iseult realize the presence of sin and constantly struggle against it to a tragic ending. The wages of sin are death, and this moral which the Tristan story teaches -- which makes it the more human and appealing -- is abandoned in the lighter treatment of Chretien.

But not only is the subject of conventionality important during this romantic age of chivalry. Accompanying this new system of honor and morals, or rather growing out of it, we find a rejuvenation of the conception of woman. Chivalrous conceptions of woman joined with the Platonic belief in the redeeming power of

beauty to form the mediaeval religion of love.[1] The association of redeeming beauty with womanly beauty probably came about in two ways -- religious worship of the virgin Mary, and later the chivalric homage paid to high born ladies by the poets of Provence.[2]

As has been mentioned, this was an age when the craze for beauty obsessed the people, earthly beauty it is true, but beauty which was later to become the medium through which was to pass God's own radiance. Doubtless the writers of this age did not recognize the six steps of Plato's progression for all true lovers, but they did recognize and worship beauty for its own sake. It was not long, however, until literature passed to the more idealized state and we have the literature of divine love as personified by Galahad, in which celestial love supersedes the earthly love of the earlier ages.

1. The Platonic belief in the redeeming power of Beauty may be briefly stated in his six steps in the life of a lover. First, the lover looks upon the woman and sees her physical beauty. Second, He idealizes this beauty, giving it additional qualities. Third, Instead of idealizing this one woman, he draws his ideal from many beautiful women. Fourth, Realizing the relation of the mind with this selection, he ascends from the physical realm. Fifth, Realizing that true beauty is in the spiritual realm, he strives to attain a vision of the Heavenly beauty. Sixth, Attaining a realization of Heavenly beauty, he strives to identify himself with God, or true beauty, which is the ideal which mortals may always strive for but never attain.
   One theory put forward by the Platonists of the Florentine Academy was that the Soul came from Heaven and while there it had a view of a certain amount of Heavenly Beauty. Upon coming to earth and entering the body of man it was like being placed in a cage of dark glass where the beauty heretofore seen was forgotten. But as the intellect of man underwent the various stages of the lover as noted above, the Soul awoke as it viewed familar Beauty. Hence the beautiful nature of the soul. The Soul, coming from Heaven, is transplanted in various soils. It is the nature of this soil, or intellect, which determines whether the soul shall attain in any proportion the height of Beauty with which it had previously dwelled.

2. Modern Language Association Publications. Vol. 26, p 464.

The following passage gives a very good idea of the conception of beauty during this time:

"For beauty we see a man forget himself, and on beholding a face graced with this celestial gift, his limbs will quake, his hair stand on end, and he will sweat and shiver at the same time; just as one who, seeing some heavenly vision, is possessed by the divine frenzy; and when he has come to himself worship it in his thoughts and bows down to it in his heart, and acknowledging it as it were God, gives himself up as a victim and a sacrifice on the altar of that fair lady's heart."[1]

Chretien's conception of beauty with its tinge of Platonism is well brought out in Yvain, when Yvain contemplates the beauty of Laudine from the window:

"Whence came beauty so marvelous? God must have made her with His naked hand that nature might rest from further toil. If she should try to make a replica, she might spend her time in vain without succeeding in her task. Even God, Himself, were He to try, could not succeed, I guess, in ever making such another, whatever effort He might put forth."[2]

Truly the poetry of the age heralds the emergence of Woman. She is no longer merely the 'upper cook' and the 'rearer of children', but becomes the object of admiration and adoration, if not of her own husband, at least to another man. In fact, we find one of the rules which governed courtly life to have been that conjugal relations destroyed love. In this age, when it was a disgrace to work, marriage became an economic problem rather than one of love, and romantic attachment had no necessary reference to matrimony.

The feudal system, with the strong protecting the weak, naturally affected the relations of the sexes. Woman, though weaker than man, became the ruler and eventually the tyrant, who demanded the allegiance of knights. Under this new influence of woman, vast importance became attached to social etiquette and decorum. Definite rules governed the sexes in all their relations. It was

1. Modern Language Publications. Vol. 26, p 465-6.
2. Chretien De Troyes: Arthurian Romance p 199.

to such an environment that the troubadours belonged, which explains the fact that love was the chief inspiration of their songs. It is in the songs of these minstrels that we find the earliest expression of courtly love.

Courtly love was aided in France by Eleanor of Aquitaine, and later by her daughter, Marie of Champagne, and other noble ladies who settled difficult questions argued before mock courts of love over which they presided. These decisions became rules for the guidance of all lovers. Here we find that it is the duty of the lover "to be joyous day and night; to be envious of no one; to love God, to destroy no good man's reputation, to support no bad cause, to love his lady, to praise 'ses faits, ses riz, ses jeux', and to be curious to find things to please her; to be gentle, doulz et plaisant; not to be silent but to speak seasonably and graciously; to clothe himself neatly, not to slander anyone, to be generous in giving, to be secret, not to be proud, to sing, dance, joust, and fight well. If one's own country is at peace, to get the lady's consent to go abroad to war; to discipline one's followers, to spare no pain, peril, or labor to win love."[1]

The influence of Marie and her courts of love is clearly seen in the work of Chretien, who was the first to portray the social ideal of the French aristocracy of the twelfth century. He tells us at the beginning of the Conte de la Charrette that he wrote at the instigation of Marie of Champagne and the content of his work would cause no one to doubt his statement.[2] Chretien furnishes il-

1. Vida Scudder: Morte D'Arthur. Ch. III, Pt. II, p 227.
2. Chretien De Troyes: Arthurian Romances p 270, Vv 1-30.

lustrations for many of the decisions handed down by the popular 'Courts of Love'. In telling of the agonies of love which Alexander undergoes for Soredamors, Chretien employs many of the courtly rules which we have noted. Their love was silent, illicit, abashed in the presence of the other, hidden:

"They dare neither speak nor act in accordance with what each sees in the other, ... and their love but grows and flames the more. However, it is the custom of all lovers to feast their eyes gladly with gazing, if they can do no more..... Their love waxes and grows anon; but each is abashed before the other ... Both of them are in great torment for in order that none may perceive their trouble they are forced to deceive people by a feigned bearing; but at night comes the bitter moan, which each one makes within his breast.... Of Alexander I will tell you first .... Love presents beforehis mind her for whom he is in such distress; it is she who has filched his heart away and grants him no rest, because he delights to recall the beauty and the grace of her...."[1]

According to the familiar conceit of the chivalrous age, beauty enters the heart thrcugh the eye, inflicting a wound which only the lady can heal.

"If the dart entered through the eye, why does the heart in the breast complain when the eye which received the first effect makes no complaint of it at all? I can readily account for that: the eye is not concerned with the understanding, nor has it any part in it; but it is the mirror of the heart and through this mirror passes, without doing harm or injury, the flame which sets the heart on fire."[2]

"She has secured greater revenge than she ever could have done had she not been aided by love, who attacks him so gently that he wounds his heart through his eyes. And this wound is more enduring than any inflicted by lance or sword. A sword blow is cured and healed at once as soon as a doctor attends it, but the wound of love is worst when it is nearest to its physician."[3]

Another conventional fancy of the time was that, though absent from the loved one, the lover leaves his heart with her. An excellent example of this is found in Yvain, when Yvain leaves Laudine and goes to Britain:

1. Chretein De Troyes: Arthurian Romances p 90.
2. Chretien De Troyes: Arthurian Romances p 100.
3. Ibid p 197.

"My lord Yvain is so distressed to leave his lady that his heart remains behind. The King may take his body off but he cannot lead his heart away. She who stays behind clings so tightly to his heart that the King has not the power to take it away with him. When the body is left without the heart it cannot possibly live on. For such a marvel was never seen as the body alive without the heart. Yet this marvel now came about: for he kept his body without the heart, which was wont to be enclosed in it, but which would not follow the body now. The heart has a good abiding place, while the body, hoping for a safe return to its heart, in strange fashion takes a new heart of hope, which is so often deceitful and treacherous."[1]

A good discussion of the love theories of this age is found in De Arte Honeste Amandi.[2] The author, Andreas Capellanus, defines love as a passion arising from contemplation of beauty in the opposite sex. According to Ancreas, courtly love was sensual and illicit, and frequently adulterous. Marriage tended to destroy any love which might have existed before the union. Consequently a love sensual and illicit must needs be secret, for it was thought that a love which was divulged did not endure. In order to meet the courtly requirements, love must not be too easily obtained. Hence the coldness and capriciousness of the lady is employed periodically so as to keep the aspiring lover in his proper place.

The obeisance of the lover is well brought out in the Conte de la Charrette. Lancelot, the beau ideal of knighthood at the court at which Chretien was familiar, courts disgrace to please his lady, constatly placing unlawful love before chivalric honor. The theories represented in this story make love a cult or a religion. The woman becomes dominant and rules as a haughty and tyrannical sovereign. The submissiveness of the lover and the absolute authority of the lady is exaggerated. The watchword of the story seems to be that the "Queen can do no wrong".

1. Chretien De Troyes: Arthurian Romances p 214
2. W. G. Dodd: Courtly Love in Chaucer and Gower. pp 5-7

The romantic pageantry of courtly love is everywhere present. Lancelot braves every danger in order to reach and rescue his lady. He crosses the sword bridge unprotected in any way:

"He is going to support himself with his bare feet and hands upon the sword, which was sharper than a scythe, for he had not kept on his feet either sole or upper or hose... He preferred to maim himself rather than to fall from the bridge and be plunged in the water from which he could never escape... He passes over with great pain and agony, being wounded in the hands, knees, and feet. But even this suffering is sweet to him, for Love, who leads him on, assuages and relieves the pain." [1]

Thus Lancelot braves any danger for the sake of his lady. He sacrifices his honor and is always obedient to her slightest wish.[2] He delights in the slightest token of his lady and always treats her with adoration.[3] To offset this devotion on the part of the lover we have the lady's conventional lack of feeling. Conventionality and etiquette always lurk in the rear of the stage, even though love is in the foreground.

Love was the fount and origin of every good. With such a Platonic basis, it is not strange that there were many redeemable features in the love theories of this age. Aside from sensualism the ideal of love was high. The greatest sin was unfaithfulness, and while the basis of love may have been sensual, yet it incited the lover to worthy deeds and demanded nobility and moderation rather than voluptuousness. Amour incited the lover to great deeds in the earthly realm even as the Neo-Platonic theory of love eventually incited the lover to divine aspirations.

The good knight held himself at the service of every woman. To rescue a woman, a knight must needs leave his own brother in Jeo-

1. Chretien De Troyes: Arthurian Romances p 309.
2. Ibid pp 316-8; 341-2.
3. Ibid pp 288; 328-30.

pardy. However, a knight owed special attention to the lady whose badge he wore, and must maintain her preeminence over others with his life. If love so decreed, this lady might be the wife of some other man. If the homage be approved by the husband as a tribute to her worth, the matter proceeded harmoniously. If the husband did not approve, it became dangerous, but this added peril made it the more attractive to Arthurian romance.

Examples of both the above cases are to be found in Tristan. When the Irish knight wins Iseult with his harp and carries her away, Mark is more than glad to have Tristan appear as her champion, pursue the knight and regain his Queen.[1] Later, however, when the jealousy of Mark is aroused and he seeks to separate the lovers, it becomes perilous indeed for Tristan to continue his knight errantry. It is only by luck and the good will of the writer that he escapes death when caught by Mark.[2] Tristan, though exiled, must see his lady(whose badge he wears) and he returns to court in various disguises. One time he returns as a fool, which is a sacrifice indeed for a renowned knight to offer even on the altar of his love.[3] It is apparent that many of the rules of courtly love are the outgrowth of conditions as we have seen them in the review of early versions of Tristan. We are not told in any of these early versions of Tristan that he was prone to suffer "changes of temperature" as did the lovers of the courtly age. However, in a less superficial manner, he was extremely restless and ill at east when away from his lady.

1. Gottfried: Tristan and Iseult. Vol. II, pp 37-9
2. Ibid pp 106-7.
3. Eilhart: Tristan and Iseult. Vol. I. pp 58-9

In their many separations, Tristan really tries to stay away from Iseult but despite his loyal attempts, he eventually fails. Lovers in this chivalrous age attempt to do likewise, but we are always obsessed with the idea that it is all done for stage effect, while in Tristan we seem to feel a real, human effort to do the right thing even though opposed by fate itself.

Iseult does not rule as tyrannically or outrageously as do the ladies of Eleanor's court. It is true that in some of the oldest versions we find her driving Tristan away with blows[1] when she thought that he was disloyal to her, but this was merely an evidence of her primitive nature which might be expected at this early age. Iseult was at least sincere and did not use her love merely as a handy garment with which to hide many faults.

After having seen the passionate love of Tristan and Iseult in the earlier stories, we approach the love theories of Chretien and his school as one who descends from the mountain top to the valley. From that love which one must feel has real depth and quality, we come to love which is considered as an art to be practiced rather than a passion to be felt. Love becomes a matter of behavior which is to be confined within certain limits. Emotions are imitated until they become stereotyped.[2] From a love which found expression in a real, though primitive, passion of man for woman, we have come to a conception of love which is camouflaged by a veneer of conventionality. We shall now proceed to Malory and study his presentation of the Tristan story, especially noting the influence of the age in which he wrote.

1. Eilhart: Tristan and Iseult. Vol. I. p 49

2. W. G. Dodd: Courtly Love in Chaucer and Gower. p 10-16.

III.

MALORY'S TRISTAN AND ISEULT.

There are three definite periods distinguishable in the story of Arthurian Romance. In the period extending from the 5th to the 10th century came the origins of definite legends, such as those in Nennius. The period from the 11th to the 13th century was one of much work and may be subdivided into three division, (1) pseudo-historical, in which comes the chronicles, either prose or verse; (2) romance poems; (3) prose romances, which were the chief sources of Malory, e.g. Gottfried and Wolfram. The last period was one of translation and adaptation. According to Dr. Sommers, the direct sources of Malory were the following: Nennius, Geoffrey, Wace, Layamon, Langtoft and Robert of Glousester' Chronicles, Huchown's Morte Arthure, and metrical Romances of unknown authorship.[1]

If anyone should become curious today and ask about Arthur, it is very likely that they would be referred to either Malory or Tennyson. Of Tennyson's life a slight examination will produce almost complete details, but the opposite is true in regard to the life of Malory. Until comparatively recently the life of Malory has been unknown even to his most devoted students. Dr. Kittredge has made some important discoveries in this field, which it seems proper to insert in an abbreviated form.[2]

He sets forth three requirements which must be met in order to definitely determine the real Malory. First, he must have been a knight, because in the preface Caxton says that he printed

1. O. K. Somers: Le Morte D'Arthur p 283.
2. G. L. Kittredge: Who was Malory?

"after a coype unto me delyverd whyche coype Syr Thomas Malorye dyd take oute of certeyn bookes of frensshe and reduced it in to Englysshe". Second, he was alive in the IX year of the reign of Edward, for we are told that the book was ended in the IX year of the reign of Edward IV by Malory, knight. He must have been old enough to have written in that year. Caxton's colophon was printed in 1485. He seems to imply that the manuscript was not given him by Malory.

These conditions are fulfilled by a Sir Thomas Malory found in Sir William Dugdales' Antiquities of Warwickshire, a Knight of Newbold Revell, a Member of Parliament for Warwickshire in 1445. He was (1) a knight, (2) he died in 1470, and (3) this would make him both old and young enough. This Sir Thomas Malory served with the Earl of Warwick in France and was conspicuous on the Lancastrian side in the War of the Roses.[1]

Originality in the middle ages meant the best retelling of an old tale. Malory's Morte D'Arthur is the last of a series of retelling and redactions of Arthurian romance. Many of the older tales he does not tell and others are only related in part. His treatment is more psychological than pictorial. Costumes, ornaments, rich furnishings disappear and are replaced by a better portrayal of the spirit of the times. The purpose of Malory was to present the controlling interests of the middle ages -- love, religion, war -- "in their ideal symmetry and their actual conflict". He does this by telling the story of the rise and fall of chivalry with its three loyalties -- to the overlord, to the lady, and to God -- in relation to the Round Table. The characters retain much of their naturalness and tournaments are

1. G. L. Kittredge, "Who was Malory?"

held with something of their former fervor. Yet it is increasingly evident that the three loves -- to God, to lady, and to overlord -- cannot harmonize.

Malory's Morte D'Arthur has been both praised and condemned with almost equal regularity and the grounds for each assertion are apparent. The writing is so simple and natural, so lacking in rhetorical ornament that we are prone to overlook its art. Malory's book has been reproached with lack of unity. There can be no doubt that there ~~are~~ is a complexity of stories, but we must consider that he undertook to mould a vast amount of incongruous material. That Malory was popular in his own day there can be no doubt when we find no less a person than Roger Ascham asserting that the Morte D'Arthur was "received into the princes chamber when God's Bible was banished from the court".

Malory's Morte D'Arthur is the fountain head of most English Arthurian material. To Malory goes the praise of having made England feel Arthur and the Round Table as national heroes. It was here that Tennyson gained his inspiration and from it came many more stories.

"The mightest chiefs of English song
Scorned not such legends to prolong".[1]

Malory very properly belongs to the period of the Renaissance. He attempted to preserve legends of Britain at a time when scholars were chiefly busy with the classics of Greece and Rome. Chivalry and feudalism began to fade away in this age and the spirit of the renascence was in the air.

Malory's book gives us the best portrayal of ideas and ideals of the fifteenth century that we possess. In the time of Mal-

1. W. H. Schofield: Chivalry in English Literature p. 79.

ory, England never had a more proud and privileged aristocracy, nor a more corrupt one. The best nobles were reckless, dishonest, sensual, and brutal. The natural issue was riot and disorder. Every sort of foul crime was common, and suspicion and uncertainty afflicted the nation. The chivalric virtues of truth and honor seemed to be dead.

"A man that should of truth tell.
With great lords he may not dwell,
In true story, as clerks tell,
Truth is put in low degree.
In ladies chamber cometh he not,
There dare truth get no foot'.
Though he would, he may not
Come among the high meiny."[1]

In his Morte D'Arthur, Malory sought to arouse a spirit of nationalism. In his account of Arthur's wars, he tried to establish pride in a united England, and to show the calamity of wavering truth and allegiance. By good and bad knights he sought to raise the standard of individual honor. Arthur is the frank, generous monarch -- a man with 'a great eager heart'. He "had liefer die with honor than to live with shame". King Mark is the opposite of Arthur, for he is mean and wily, "a fair speaker and a false thereunder"; a liar, traitor, and a murderer.[2] The Morte D'Arthur has Arthur always conspicuous in the background, even though it is chiefly concerned with the exploits of other members of the Round Table. Through feats of arms, the knights reveal their worthiness or unworthiness, thus furnishing an example for the knights of Malory's own age. Caxton writes that the Morte D'Arthur is for gentlemen's

1. W. H. Schofield: Chivalry in English Literature. p 99.
2. Ibid p 95

perusal. Princes and nobles studied the tales of Lancelot and Tristan in much the same manner, perhaps, that the Courtier was later studied.

Malory shows no particular fondness for courtly love. On the contrary, as I shall show later, he portrays his amours in a rather cold fashion. Malory has a deeper purpose and portrays knight errantry at the expense of amours. Doubtless he felt that it was this feature of court life which would do more toward the regeneration of England than a detailed portrayal of amours. Malory brings out Tristan's early training in the manner of the Courtier, thus aiming at the benefit of the nobles of his day. He hurries over the love themes to tell of Tristn's prowess in field and chase. Especially does he emphasize hunting, which was then, as now, the gentlemen's sport in England.

The following extract shows Malory's personal feeling regarding love --

"For like a winter rasure doth always erase and deface green summer, so fareth it by unstable love in man and woman. For in many persons there is no stability, for we may see all day for a little blast of winters rasure, anon we shall deface and lay apart true love for little or naught, that cost much thing. This is no wisdom nor stability, but it is feebleness of nature and great disworship whosoever useth this. Therefore like as May month flowereth and flourisheth in many gardens so in likewise let every man of worship flourish his heart in this world, first unto God and next unto the joy of them he promised his faith unto, for there never was worshipful man nor woman, but they loved one better than another; and worship in arms may never be failed; but first reserve the honor to God, and secondly the quarrel must come of thy lady and such call I virtuous love. But nowadays men cannot love seven night but they must have all their desires, that love may not endure by reason; for where they be soon accorded, and hasty heat, soon it cooleth. Right so fareth love nowadays; soon hot, soon cold. This is no stability, but the old love was not so. Men and women could love seven years and no wanton lusts were between them, and there was love truth and faithfulness, And lo, in likewise was used love in King Arthur's days".[1]

1. W. H. Schofield: Chivalry in English Literature p 79.

When we consider his artistocratic lineage, training as a gentleman and soldier, his participation in foreign and civil war, the vicissitudes of his own fortune and probable suffering in prison we better understand Malory's Morte D'Arthur. It stands out as a work of retrospect, tinged with sadness for the passing of the good old days; a work of idealism, troubled with knowledge of miserable facts; a work of patriotism in the time of civil strife.

Caxton, in his preface which adds much to our knowledge of the work, says of it:

"It shows how noble acts... came to honor, and how they that were vicious were punished...noble lords and ladies... that shall read in this said book and work, that they take the good and honest acts and follow the same.--- For herein may be seen noble chivalry, courtesy, humanity, friendliness, hardiness, love, friendship, cowardice, murder, hate, virtue, sin. Do after the good and leave the evil...beware that we fall not to vice and sin, but to exercise and follow firtue, by the which we may come and attain to good fame and renown in this life, and after this short and transitory life to come unto everlasting bliss in Heaven."[1]

Evidently Caxton considers the Morte D'Arthur as a book of moral edification, as well as entertainment. He thinks of it as patriotic, for it causes Englishmen to know more about the reign and realm of Arthur. By presenting Arthur as a real king and the greatest of his kind, and definitely locating him, a national interest is secured.

Yet despite the high ideals running through the book, we are disappointed in the handling of many of the individual stories. Chivalry is the high light and other things are merely explanatory. Yet this does not sufficiently explain the almost sacrilegious treatment of such tales as the Tristan and Iseult legend. In the earlier tales we have seen this story as one of passion and sentiment. In

1. Caxton's Preface to Morte D'Arthur. pp 2-3

Malory the story is coarsened and conventionalized, and is used in such a manner that it seems to be only a prop used to further the main play which is on the stage. The story is dulled by interminable jousts and journeys which are all very much alike, and which obscure the love of Tristan and Iseult by showing the brilliance of Arthur's court and chivalry. Lancelot runs throughout as the ideal lover with Tristan more than a lap behind. As one reads the book, the fact becomes apparent that even Palomides, the Saracen, is really a more passionate lover -- and of Iseult too-- than is Tristan who in old days was unsurpassed. King Mark gains the attributes of coward, murderer, and traitor, a characterization, which, serving as an excuse for the lovers, takes away much of the tragic quality of the story.

That Malory presents an ideal which was needed, and handles the story in a more psychological manner than the earlier writers cannot be denied, but that he has destroyed much of the appeal of the older versions is equally evident. The reader who desires an emotional appeal would do well to return to the version of Gottfried. Malory has a habit of breaking off abruptly almost in the middle of an episode and introducing a new set of characters. Sometimes it seems that he takes one group of characters down the road of chivalrous progress to a certain milestone and then returns for another party. He no sooner gets them together than one party again goes forward while the other waits for the cue to proceed. During the first few episodes we are content to permit Tristan to go out and fight with Sir Lamorak or some other equally good knight, just when he has been united with Iseult, but after a few such incidents we

are ready for him to stay with his love if only to break the monotony of interminable jousts.

In the books of the Morte D'Arthur which tell of Tristan and Iseult, we frequently find long spaces intervening in which Tristan and Iseult totally disappear and are replaced by some of the other knights with which the book abounds. For example, Book IX opens with La Cote Male Taile and Lancelot occupying the center of the stage, and it is not until the tenth chapter of that book that we find mention of Tristan.

The Tristan and Iseult story is thoroughly bound up with that of Arthur and his court. Malory tells us at the beginning that Arthur reigns, thus connecting England, Wales, and Scotland, and that Mark rules under Arthur. At the time of the Morholt conflict, Mark wants to send for Lancelot to come and protect the truage of Cornwall. Later we hear of the fame of Lancelot at the tournament in Ireland, and are also told that Morholt was a knight of the Round Table.[1]

When Tristan marries the second Iseult, we find Lancelot passing judgment with the authority of a judge superior. The achievements of Tristan are so closely allied with the court of Arthur that in different instances Tristan comes to the rescue of Arthur and saves his life.[2]

The actual story of Malory's version of Tristan's life and his relations with Iseult might easily be recounted in a very few pages. In order to show the difference between this modern version and that of the older writers, it is almost essential that I briefly

1. Morte D'Arthur, Vol. I, pp 253 and 263
2. Ibid p 323.

outline the story.

Tristan is the son of King Meliodas of Liones and Elizabeth, sister of King Mark of Cornwall. The story opens in Liones. Meliodas, while hunting, is taken prisoner by a lady who wished to secure his love. Elizabeth, distracted by his absence, runs seeking him in the forest, where Tristan is born and the mother dies. Before dying she requests that her son be named Tristan, because of the sorrow she has had. Meliodas marries again and the stepmother, wishing to secure the land for her own sons, tries to poison Tristan. Meliodas discovers her treachery and is going to burn her as punishment but the stepmother is saved by the pleading of Tristan. However Meliodas would not permit Tristan to remain longer in danger and sends him to France to complete his education. This is characteristic of a writer of the early English Renaissance for education abroad was one of the necessities of this system.

Tristan stays abroad for seven years and becomes proficient in all the arts of a gentleman that were known in those days. Malory places more emphasis on these gentlemanly attainments than do the earlier writers, which is doubtless due to the Renascence spirit which was in the air. Especially does he learn to harp, which was one of the accomplishments of the renaissance gentleman. Of course Tristan was always noted as a harpist, but Malory emphasizes this attribute rather than some of the more primitive characteristics as, e.g. the ability to throw twigs.[1]

In the episode of the Morholt [2] combat we find the story modernized by Malory. In Eilhart, Morholt came to Cornwall osten-

1. Eilhart: Tristan and Iseult. pp 60-61.
2. The spelling of the Irish champion's name has been continued as Morholt, despite the fact that Malory changes the spelling to Marhaus. This will keep the spelling uniform throughout the thesis

sibly for tribute, which was to consist of every third child, but his real motif was that of conquest. In Malory, Morholt comes to collect the truage of Cronwall, but this tribute does not consist of children. Morholt is a knight of the Round Table and conducts himself in a fashion befitting such an exalted station.

In the earlier versions when Tristan wishes to defend Cornwall against the invader, Mark allows him to do so with the greatest reluctance because of his sincere regard for him. In this later version, however, when Mark discovers his identity, he hails him more as a savior than as a dear nephew, and really barters knighthood in exchange for his promise to defend the kingdom against Morholt.

There is one instance of what may be termed weak motivation in regard to this episode which is especially striking. Mark sends a message to the King of Ireland announcing that he will not pay the truage and to send a knight to fight for it. However, when the knight comes, Mark hasn't the least idea whom he will secure to make good his challenge. This may have been intentional in order to show the irresponsibility of Mark, but it seems much more likely that the author wished to put in this episode in which Tristan comes to the rescue of Cornwall and hence inserts the story of the earlier writers as one would cover a round hole with a square patch without trimming the edges.

The healing voyage is much the same in Malory as in Gottfried, although the old custom of returning to the place whence the poison came, which we have spoken of before, is more clearly brought out. Instead of having been told by Morholt at the time of the conflict that Iseult of Ireland was the only person who could heal his

wound, Malory's Tristan is left in ignorance, but a short time after he has been isolated with his wound a "wise lady sends him to the country from whence the venom came". Consequently he sets out in a well provisioned vessel directly for Ireland. Upon arriving at the court he explains his wound by saying that he was "wounded in battle, fighting for lady's right", which explanation truly belongs to the more romantic age of Chivalry than the explanation given in Gottfried in which Tristan says that he was wounded while on a merchant vessel.[1]

Tristan teaches Iseult to harp and they immediately become good friends. Iseult is placed as a prize in a tournament and Tristan enters so as to save Iseult from Palomides, who otherwise would surely have captured her. This idea of a tournament is Malory's method of excluding the supernatural fight with the dragon, and placing the story upon a modern basis. The story is further modernized in the treatment of Tristan's return to Cornwall. In the old versions when his identity was discovered, it was only by an emotional appeal that his life was spared. Malory employs reason rather than the emotion in sending him away from court. He had gained the friendship of King Anguish who is reluctant to send him away but he reasons that he must do so in order to preserve peace with his barons and his wife.[2] Before leaving Ireland, Tristan promises King Anguish that he will always be the servant of Iseult.

When the question arises concerning who shall attempt to secure the hand of Iseult for Mark, we find Malory's account of the relations between uncle and nephew very different from that of the

1. Gottfried: Tristan and Iseult. p 87

2. Morte D'Arthur p 255

older verions. Instead of being forced to send Tristan, Mark is now anxious that he shall go, thinking that he will never return. Tristan is again successful in securing the hand of Iseult although in a very different manner. Instead of rescuing a whole land from starvation or fighting a battle with some monster which is devastating the country, he performs his mission in a more modern manner. Having been forced to land because of adverse winds, he unexpectedly meets with King Anguish who has been summoned by King Arthur to appear at the latter's court and answer to the charge of murder. Following the custom of the age, the accused must provide a champion to defend his cause. King Anguish is unable to do so and is in desperate straits when Tristan arrives. After securing his promise that he will give him what he most desires, Tristan goes into the battle and vindicates the honor of King Anguish. As a reward he then claims Iseult for his uncle, Mark.

On the voyage to Cornwall, Iseult and Tristan drink the love potion as in the early versions, but the old emotional appeal is absent. The episode of the drinking of the potion which Gottfried expands over several pages of lingering, delicious sweetness, Malory condenses into four sentences which is scarcely sufficient for a plain statement of the case.[1] Bragwaine is merely mentioned as the guardian of the potion, and her later substitution for Iseult with its pathos and self-sacrifice is not mentioned. The later attempt upon the life of Bragwaine is represented as being brought about by the ladies of the court who were jealous of her intimacy with the Queen. This change was undoubtedly made by Malory so as to provide a better character for Iseult.

1. Morte D'Arthur p 272-3

From this somewhat more psychological treatment, Malory retracts and introduces the supernatural as motivation for the testing of Iseult. Sir Lamorak sends a magic horn to the court of Mark, which had been intended for the court of Arthur. From this horn no woman might drink without spilling except she be true. Sir Lamorak realized that both Isolt and Guenevere were impure and that their guilt would become known when they tried to drink from the magic horn. Fearing the trouble which it would cause at the court of Arthur, the good knight did not hesitate to send it to Cornwall, thus protecting the honor of the Round Table. Sir Lamorak felt that the effect of the public disgrace of the Queen of Cornwall would be negligible as compared with the disaster which would be caused by the exposure of Guenevere and Arthur's court. This episode furnishes a good example of the spirit of nationalism which Malory would have instilled into the life of England.

When Mark is convinced of the duplicity of Iseult, he places her in a Lazar-Cote(which was merely threatened in Gottfried), and attempts to kill Tristan. Tristan escapes, rescues Iseult, and they go to the forest. Here the reader is aware of a new environment, for instead of going to a love-grotto as in primitive days, the lovers live in a 'fair manor'. We are conscious that conventionality has descended lika a pall. In the middle ages the lovers were children of nature but in the age of Malory they are content to stay close to court and court life. Malory does not portray their forest life in any detail, deeming it secondary to other more material knightly pursuits. The lovers seem to go about their pursuits wearily and without enthusiasm. The exuberant life of love which so charms the reader of the older writers, is entirely absent in Malory.

After their first escape to the forest, it is not long before Tristan is accidentally shot while hunting. Before Tristan is able to return to the lodge, Mark discovers the location of the queen and takes the seemingly passive Iseult back to the court. After hearing of his wound she sends a maid to him telling him that he may be healed by Iseult of Brittany. Malory then gives a brief account of Tristan's marriage and later life with Iseult of the White Hands, which is totally lacking in emotional appeal. We are not permitted to see the struggles of the lovers when separated which was one of the most attractive bits of the older versions. Malory even represents Tristan as "almost forsaking Iseult" for this new Iseult of the White Hands.[1]

Even if we could forgive Malory for his rough treatment of the story as a whole up to this point, his ending is almost unpardonable. The death bed scene, one of the most touching descriptions in literature and one of the best portrayals of human nature, is to be found nowhere. The reader is denied that tense moment when Iseult of the White Hands determines whether she shall report the sail as black or white, and her deep remorse when she realizes the cost of her decision. Instead we are merely informed of the death of Tristan by a bald statement found in the nineteenth book - long after the story of Tristan and Iseult has ended. Here we are told that he was killed by King Mark "as he sat harping before his lady La Beale Isoud, with a trenchant glaive, for which death there was much bewailing of every knight that ever were in Arthur's days;... and Sir Tristan slew King Mark, and La Beale Isoud died swooning upon the corse of Sir Tristan, whereof there was a great pity".[2]

1. Morte D'Arthur, Vol. I. p 390.
2. Ibid Vol. II. p 334.

The character of Tristan suffers as much at the hands of Malory as does the basic structure of the story. His character vacillates from one extreme to another, especially in the early part of the book. He always remains true to Iseult although in an undemonstrative fashion. However, he always has a passion to become a member of the Round Table, and in some instances it would seem that this equals if not really subordinates love. He fights Arthur's knights so as to "increase his worship".[1] His prowess in chivalrous pursuits is proven in episode after episode.[2] He wins so much renown that when he arrives at the court of Arthur he is greeted very courteously and urged to remain at court, which he does, taking the place of Morholt whom he has previously killed.

So well accomplished was Tristan in truth and chivalry that even his enemies admired him.[3] Palomides who had every reason to oppose Triatan, always admires him. When they are imprisoned together, Palomides abuses Tristan in every manner but the latter retaliates with kindness. His chivalrous attitude as well as his deference to Lancelot is shown in his reply to the lady who desired him to rescue a child for her.

"Well, my lady, said Sir Tristan, and for my lord Sir Lancelot's sake I shall get you that child again, or else I shall be beaten for it."[4]

Yet there is another side to Tristan which destroys much of the idealism which has clung to him prior to the reading of Malory.

1. Morte D'Arthur, Vol. I. p 261
2. Ibid Vol. I. pp 265,270,346.
3. Ibid Vol. I. p 294
4. Ibid Vol. I. p 267

Prior to Malory, Tristan loved only one woman and that was Iseult of the White Hand. In Malory we find a record of a French girl who falls in love with him during his early years in France. Later, after having met Iseult he becomes infatuated with the wife of Sir Segwarides, in which amour he is opposed by Mark. Because of his relations with the wife of Segwarides, Tristan is denounced as a "false traitor knight", which is a harsher phrase than we have heard applied to Tristan in previous stories.

The character of Malory's Tristan seems to be of a decidedly contradictory nature when in the latter part of the episode, we find him stipulating terms to King Anguish before he will defend him. He insists that the King swear that he is in the right before he will undertake his defense, but he did not hesitate to injure the husband of the woman he had wronged.

A bravado spirit seems to possess Tristan at many times. When he has been forced to flee from the court of King Mark, he meets two of his knights on the road and "there he struck off the head of the one, and wounded the other to the death; and he made him to bear his his brothers head in his helm unto the king".[1] He commits this deed with no other provocation than his animosity toward his uncle which really did not reach the point of personal violence. We constantly find him boasting loudly of his achievements, an unknown thing in the Tristan of Gottfried.[2] When Mark banishes him from Cornwall, he speaks with irony of his past services to the country and accuses Mark and his barons of base ingratitude.[3]

The character of Tristan as a lover has likewise degenerated to a marked degree. Malory contrasts the love of Tristan and

1. Morte D'Arthur, Vol. I. p 284.
2. Ibid p 293
3. Ibid p 332.

that of Lancelot, the former being caused by the potion while the latter was natural love and hence more dignified. While Malory frequently makes the cold statement that Tristan and Iseult cannot live without each other, and causes them to swoon at stated intervals, the overpowering passion which we are accustomed to connect with the Tristan and Iseult story is almost entirely gone. In one instance we are almost horrified to find Tristan permitting the paynim Sir Palomides to fight a battle for Iseult while he stands in the background.[1] Later when Tristan is injured while hunting, we are told that not even Iseult might do anything to aid him.[2]

The contrast between the departure of Tristan and Iseult from the court of Mark in the early versions and their trip to Joyous Gard in Malory is characteristic of the two presentations of the story. In the Gottfried version, the lovers flee from the court only when their great love makes it absolutely imperative, and Tristan constantly fights against the impulse because he feels that it will be disloyal to his uncle. In Malory, Tristan merely writes to Iseult making the bald assertion that they should leave immediately for the land of Logris. As in the case of Cliges, this is far more immoral than the older story because they do not even attempt to struggle against this unconventional action.[3] When Tristan goes insane and wanders in the forest, we are not impressed so much with his great love as with the fact that Malory makes this a motif for certain acts of prowess which happen during this sojourn in the wilderness. The entire incident harks back to Yvain, in

1. Morte D'Arthur, Vol. II, p 83.
2. Ibid p. 122.
3. Ibid p 56.

which the hero wanders in the forest while he is out of the favor of his lady.[1]

After Tristan has been at the court of Arthur for a long time during the period of his exile, King Mark visits the court and Arthur arranges that he shall take Tristan back to Cornwall with him. Malory devotes only a part of one sentence to telling of Tristan's desire, after the long absence, to see Iseult, saying that his return "was for the intent to see La Beale Isoud, for without sight of her Sir Tristan might not endure", after which passionless statement he immediately proceeds to a chapter telling of Sir Lamorak.[2] In a battle with Elias for the truage of Cornwall, Tristan is almost overcome but remembering that Iseult is watching him he gains strength and conquers.[3] This account immediately recalls the same incident in Chretien's 'Lancelot', and we feel that the incident is introduced because it is an attractive episode rather than to show any great passion for his lady.

The character of Iseult is also dimmed in the hands of Malory. Even as Lancelot is the peer of Tristan in chivalrous love, so is Guenevere ranked above Iseult. Guenevere may be considered as filling the place of Marie of Champagne as the head of a court of love. When Iseult learns that Tristan has married the second Iseult, Malory tells us that Iseult "made a letter unto Queen Guenevere, complaining her of the untruth of Tristan and how he had wedded the king's daughter of Brittany." Guenevere answers that Tristan will repent and eventually love her better than before.

1. Chretien De Troyes: Arthurian Romances, Yvain p 217.
2. Morte D'Arthur, Vol. II, p 12.
3. Ibid p 24.

Malory's portrayal of the characters of Tristan and Iseult is typical of the Morte D'Arthur. Because he was interested in chivalry and writing with a definite purpose in view, Tristan's love affairs are constantly subordinated to chivalrous duties. We see little of his relations with his lady. He no sooner meets her than it is necessary for him to return to some strange country and enter a tournament. The lovers no longer occupy the center of the stage to the exclusion of all other things, but serve merely as a sidelight on the main action.

However, Iseult occupies a more favorable position in the pageant of love than does Tristan. Probably because he was unable to dim the actions of Iseult with the curtain of chivalry as in the case of Tristan, Malory presents an Iseult which corresponds much more closely to the Iseult of old than do any of the other characters to their originals. True Iseult does not occupy the stage as much as formerly, but when she does appear, she seems more real than does Tristan.

When Tristan leaves Ireland for the first time, Iseult wilfully promises that she will not marry for seven years and then only with the approval of Tristan, which shows her love even prior to the drinking of the potion. Malory doubtless wished to portray a love which was not caused by any supernatural method, and hence more appealing to the court of his age.

In order to derive the most pleasure from reading Malory it is necessary to read between the lines. The presentation of the love of Iseult is rich in incident but sadly lacking in detail which must be supplied from earlier knowledge. Malory tells us that

"full woe was La Beale Isoud when she heard tell that Sir Tristan was wedded to Isoud La Blanche Maine". This is indeed a rather uninspiring statement if we were not able to clothe the skeleton with details which are familiar to us from a study of Eilhart and Gottfried.

If the depth of Iseult's passion was in direct proportion to the number of times that she swoons, nothing further might be desired. When Tristan returns from the forest, Iseult does not at first recognize him, but when she does Malory tells us that "thereupon Isoud fell down in a swoon and so lay a great while". If time and space would permit we could continue almost indefinitely with examples of such trite handling of really good scenes.[1] The more we read the story of Tristan and Iseult the more we are impressed with the fact that whatever Malory's ability as a writer may have been, much improvement might very easily have been made in his presentation of love and lovers.

The only real lover in the entire book is the Caracen, Palomides, who throughout the work is shown as the foil of Tristan and the hopeless lover of Iseult. Perhaps it is the tragic nature of his love and the natural obesiance which he gives to Iseult which makes this subplot the more attractive. The power of the lady over the lover is more clearly brought out in the hopeless love of Palomides than in the case of Tristan and Iseult.

"And now, Sir Tristan, I will that ye wit that I have loved La Beale Isoud many a day, and she hath been the causer of my worship, and else I had been the most simplest knight in the world. For by her, and by cause of her, I have won the worship that I have for when I remembered me of La Beale Isoud I won the worship wheresomever

1. Morte D'Arthur, Vol. I, pp. 333,325.

I came for the most part; and yet had I never reward nor bounte of her the days of my life, and yet have I been her knight guerdonless." [1]

As has been shown, the character of Mark has degenerated under the handling of Malory until he actually becomes loathsome. He is so bad that the action of the lovers in evading his watchfulness is almost excused, which tends to erase the tragic element. Only at the beginning do we find even a semblance of friendship existing between Mark and Tristan, even though Tristan tells the King of Ireland that he had fought Morholt because of love for his uncle. Later Mark avowedly sends Tristan to Ireland trusting that he will never return. Mark's treacherous attack on Tristan in the episode of Segwaride's wife gives the reader an early insight into the cowardly character of the King. Tristan is never permitted to stay at court except when Mark is threatened by his enemies and needs assistance.

Instead of the kind and indulgent uncle of the older tales this new Mark both fears and envies his nephew. When he was told that it was Tristan who did so marvelously well at a tournament,[2] the "king smote down his head, and in his heart he feared soretthat Sir Tristan should get him such worship in the realm of Logris where through that he himslef should not be able to withstand him." When Mark heard of the great prowess of Tristan at the Court of Arthur he was greatly incensed and sought to destroy him:-

"Then was King Mark passing sorry when he heard of the honor of Sir Tristan,....Then said King Mark unto his two knights: Now will tell you my counsel,... and I will that ye wit that my coming hither is to this intent, for to destroy Sir Tristan by

1. Morte D'Arthur, Vol.II, p 121.
2. Morte D'Arthur Vol. I, p 359

wiles or by treason; and it shall be hard if ever he escape our hands."[1]

Cornwall was looked upon by the court of Arthur as a nation of cowards led by King Mark, who was, as Sir Gaheris said, 'ever full of treason'.[2] In almost every joust in which we find Mark engaged, he takes some treacherous advantage of his opponent. When Tristan goes to meet the wife of Segwarides Mark tries to overpower him with overwhelming numbers. Mark goes to meet Sir Uwaine and slays him by appearing suddenly from behind a wall and attacking before Uwaine is prepared.

The base cowardice of Mark is shown when he jousts with a knight of recognized prowess. Dagonet dons the armour of Modred and chases Mark through the forest, without any opposition. When Mark meets Lancelot and is forced to joust with him, he falls from his saddle and begs for mercy.[3] Lancelot gives him the appelation of'King Fox', which is typical of his hypocritical attitude in regard to every good thing.

With this brief summary of Malory's presentation of the Tristan and Iseult story, we can see the degeneration of the principal characters and better understand Tennyson's later attitude as portrayed in The Last Tournament. It is true that the characters as we have them in Malory fit the ideal which he wished to represent. Malory's general motif of producing a work which would be of benefit to his country is likewise commendable. Yet one who is familiar with the Tristan and Iseult story in its more primitive stage cannot refrain from being a little piqued at the mutilation of this wonderful tale.[4]

1. Morte D'Arthur Vol. I, p 381
2. Ibid p 36.

We shall now proceed to a discussion of Tennyson's conception of the Tristan and Iseult story, noting details of the story itself and especially the influence of the age in which he wrote.

3. Morte D'Arthur, Vol. I, p 394.
4. We have already pointed out the similarities between many of the incidents in Malory and those in older tales, as e.g. When Tristan was with the wife of Segwarides, the blood on the sheets harks back directly to the same episode in Chretien's 'Lancelot'.
   When Tristan and Iseult landed on their way from Ireland and stayed at a castle over night it was necessary for them to fight the champion of the castle before they were allowed to proceed on their journey. It seems quite likely that this incident might very well be the source of Spenser when he introduces almost the same incident into the Book of Chastity.

IV

TENNYSON'S "THE LAST TOURNAMENT".

During the classical and rationalistic period of English literature, the romance of King Arthur was relegated to oblivion, and it was not until new editions of Malory were published in the early nineteenth century that interest was reawakened in Arthurian Tradition. Fifty years after this republication of Malory, Tennyson gave to the world his famous Idylls of the King, which has since been the chief source of Arthurian material for a majority of modern readers.

The bare outline of the Idylls Tennyson based upon Malory although there are many incidents which he plainly takes from other sources, especially from the Mabinogion and Geoffrey's History.[1] That Malory was his chief source, however, is admitted by Tennyson in his memoirs:

"The vision of an ideal Arthur as I have drawn him, had come upon me when, little more than a boy, I first lighted upon Malory."[2]

Tennyson's prefatory note is interesting inasmuch as it gives us in concise form his conception of the historical Arthur.

"He(Arthur) lived about 500 A.D. and defeated his enemies in a pitched battle in the Welsh kingdom of Strathclyde: and the earliest allusions to him are to be found in the Welsh bards of the seventh century. In the 12th century Geoffrey collected the legends about him as an European conqueror in his History of the Britons: and translated them from Celtic to Latin. The Morte D'Arthur of

1. In his memoirs, Tennyson says that he based his Idylls "on Malory, on Layamon's Brut, on Lady Charlotte Guest's translation of the Mabinogion, on the old chronicles, on Celtic folklore, and largely on his own imagination."

2. Memoirs p 444

Malory was printed by Caxton 1485."

It is not my purpose in this essay to go into details concerning the age in which Tennyson lived, for that is the work of the historian, but I feel that it is necessary to present very briefly a few of its outstanding characteristics. I think that the influence of environment upon Tennyson's Idylls has not been sufficiently emphasized, especially in regard to The Last Tournament.

The age of Tennyson was one of economic and social revolution, both in England and in France. Prior to this age the great mass of people had no voice in electing members to parliament. Parliament had represented aristocratic and ecclessiastical interests. But now industrial revolution opened up new fields for the masses and gave impetus to the movement toward Democracy. The rights of the people became something more than a plaything of aristocratic politicians.

But this revolutionary tremor was felt in other fields than the economic one and it is in this age that we find Science gaining a new impetus. Materialism became the popular creed and gathered many followers under its matter-of-fact wings. Such writers as Darwin and Renan set up new evolutionary conceptions of dogmatic religion which startled the world. These men believed that religion opposed science.[1] The churches naturally opposed this encroachment of science, opposition to which was unrelenting on the part of the Catholic Church. The Protestant church gradually sought

1. In this period were such works as: Darwin's Theory 1859; Spencer's Synthetic Philosophy 1860; Huxley - Man's Place in Nature 1863 ; Renan - Higher Criticism; Aquinas - Science with Religion.

to compromise between science and religion.

Prior to these revolutionary writers, a vast majority of the people of England accepted the Bible literally. It may well be imagined what a commotion was wrought by such writers as Darwin, Huxley, and Spencer when they sought to show by scientific research that life is, and has been, governed by a progressive process of revolution, which follows certain well defined laws, and that Christianity is only a matter of social usefulness. Law superseded the blind faith which had always characterised religion.

Yet there were many men who were not willing to give up the faith of their fathers. Many of the most learned men of the age were caught in the whirlpool of this changing order. Some regained the shore from which they had been swept, while others were carried to a new shore.

It was in the center of such a strife that Tennyson was cast during the early years of his life. The influence upon his work is marked, perhaps more so than has ever been pointed out. A broad discussion of this influence, however, is beyond the scope of this study, which is confined to the Last Tournament.

Tennyson floundered for a long time in the center of this whirlpool of intellectual strife and revolution as is shown in some of his early works.[1] However, a steady intellect and a firmly based faith in God enabled him to successfully pass this ordeal and saved for us the author of 'In Memoriam'.

1. This period of strife is shown in the first Locklesy Hall, in which the young man expects so much. The first of In Memoriam also shows the influence of more or less doubting although it ends with a firm faith in God.

Yet Tennyson kept step with the onward march of the age inasmuch as he seeks a compromise between thought and faith. He believed in the orderly development of law in both the natural and spiritual world, but he did not stop with mere law, for he believed that law implied a source. Here he rises above the materialists, for above their earthly laws he saw a divine law. He believed that the purpose of earthly law was merely to reveal that divine law of which it was an imitation, even as the earthly love of Plato became an inspiration toward heavenly love. If the reader will make a slight deviation from The Last Trounament, an illustration of Tennyson's conception of law and love may be found in The Eve of St. Agnes. Here we have little thought of earthly love suggesting itself to the heart of the maiden. Instead there is depicted the aspiration of a saintly spirit that longs to be a bride in heaven, and shows the eagerness to pass from a world of sin and sorrow to the celestial life.

In the Idylls of the King, Tennyson frankly tells us that he intends to present a tale 'shadowing Sense at war with Soul'. That the Idylls are allegorical there can be no doubt, for in January 1870, Tennyson gave sanction to articles appearing in the Contemporary Review, admitting that Merlin typified intellect, and the Lady of the Lake represented religion. It is interesting to note that in 1857 Tennyson had a trial[1] volume printed which was inscribed Enid and Nimue, or The True and the False, which indicates the trend of the poets mind.

1. Literary Anecdotes. Vol. II, p. 225

In view of the conditions of the age, Tennyson's endeavor to 'shadow sense at war with soul' takes on a new significance. Arthur, who slays beasts and drives out robbers, is not only a romantic king but Man's spiritual ideal overcoming base passion.[1] Tennyson represents the conflict of Sense and Soul as he felt it during an age of Materialism and ends with a declaration of his devotion to the ideal rather than the real. With the true poets conception, Tennyson feels that it is necessary to man's nature to believe that spirit rules the universe and that life is larger than mere sense.

After a period of doubting, Tennyson became firm in his conviction that the highest and truest and most real of all things are those for which science is too shallow and crude. Reality discloses itself only to the life which sees in vision and feels in responsive intuition.[2] Tennyson believes that the real is not that which the scientists analyze under a microscope but that which calls to us from the heights. We are born to seek that ideal which awaits us. Tennyson seems to have some of the feelings of the mystic who believes that at birth a spark of the divine is placed within us, which grows and seeks the ideal. Thus he leaves the static world of the materialists for the more dynamic realm of the poet.

Tennyson places an idealistic interpretation on law. He pictures Arthur as ideal because he felt that only under the inspiration of ideals, and with his 'sword bathed in heaven', could a man combat the cynical indifference, the intellectual selfishness,

1. R. H. Fletcher: Tennyson and Browning. p 295
2. G. W. Cooke: Poets and Problems. p 125

and the materialism of a scientific age. His opposition to the materialistic view is definitely stated at the end of In Memoriam:

"One God, one law, one element,
And one far off divine event,
To which the whole creation moves."

As I have said, the Idylls are undoubtedly allegorcal, picturing the corruption of a realm through the introduction of sin. In this series of Idylls, the Last Tournament is the culmination of the tragedy representing the downfall of the kingdom of Arthur. This aspect of the relation of the Last Tournament to the other Idylls has been treated by many writers, but the relation of the Last Tournament to the age in which it was written has never been established. That there is a definite relation between the ideas expressed in the Last Tournament and the environment in which it was written seems to me to be unquestionable. Written only a few years after the bomb of materialism had exploded in England, it is not strange that the Last Tournament should reflect the influence of this new power. In fact, every prominent character in the Last Tournament portrays a definite relation to the materialistic doctrines.

In the character of Guenevere, Tennyson presents that which is not ideal and which is hence the cause of the downfall of the kingdom of Arthur. Arthur is the head of this earthly kingdom which sought to reach perfection. He is the only faultless character portrayed, and personifies Tennyson's faith in the ideal. All the other characters pay the penalty for their devotion to the world of sense, but a mystical ideal surrounds Arthur. Tennyson's belief that man is the handiwork of God rather than the product of physical evolution is apparent when he says of the ideal Arthur -

"Where is he who knows?
From the great deep to the great deep he goes."[1]

The song of Tristan, beginning 'Free love-free field, we love but while we may', has been given many interpretations but its significance in the light of contemporary ideas has never been established. Yet why might not this song, placed as it is in the mouth of the degenerate Tristan, be but an echo of the materialistic age and Tennyson's veiled satire on the creed of science? This seems to be even more probable when, a little later, Iseult shows the weakness of this theory of selfish love and materialism when she says to Tristan:

" ---- ---- ------ but say I loved
This knightliest of all knights, and cast thee back
Thine own small saw, 'we love but while we may',
Well then, what answer?"[2]

The changeable Tristan might well represent the great mass of people who held a steadfast faith in a higher spirit, only to have their ideal shattered. When Tristan first came to the court of Arthur he accepted the ideal conditions as he found them.

"Moeover, that wierd legend of his birth
With Merlins mystic babble about his end
Amazed me." [3]

Soon this conception of the ideal changed and we find Tristan voicing the sentiments of a materialist. We can almost picture this ancient Tristan as having read Darwin and Huxley when we hear him say:

" But this went by -- The vows!
O ay, -- the wholesome madness of an hour -
They served their use, their time."[4]

1. References to the Last Tournament are to be found in the Cambridge edition of Tennyson's Poetical Works.
2. Last Tournament l. 705-8
3. Last Tournament l. 664-6
4. Last Tournament l. 669-71

Tristan tells of the knights of the Round Table, first asking whence Arthur had the right to rule them because

> "They failed to trace him through the flesh and blood
> Of our old kings." [1]

It would seem that the knights were trying to trace the genealogy of the mystical Arthur after the method which had lately beed advanced by Darwin.

With the coming of materialism we see the death of the ideal --

> "My God, the power
> Was once in vows when men believed the king!" [2]

The people once believed in their Ideal King but the advnet of Science made a large number of unbelievers.

The half humorous, half pathetic fool, Dagonet, might well be imbued with the characteristics of the common people. Overcome by the onset of these new scientific theories, he is sadly buffeted about but always retains his old faith in the ideal Arthur. In speaking to the materialistic Tristan of a star which was named for Arthur, he says:

> "Do ye see it? Do ye see the star?
> 'Nay fool', said Tristan, 'not in open day'.
> And Dagonet: 'Nay, nor will; I see it and hear
> It mades a silent music up in heaven
> And I and Arthur and the angels hear." [3]

The others drowned in the sensuous world are no longer able to see the old star of faith, although it still holds its same place in the firmament. Even Dagonet, the trusting servant of his

1. The Last Tournament 1. 681-2
2. The Last Tournament 1. 643-4
3. The Last Tournament 1. 346-50

King, has his period of doubting.

> "I have wallow'd, I have wash'd -- the world
> Is flesh and shadow -- I have had my day.
> The dirty nurse Experience, in her kind
> Hath foul'd me -- an I wallow'd then I wash'd".[1]

Tennyson was not an ascetic. His kingdom of Heaven was based on piety, but on piety that embraced activities of society -- on chastity, but of marriage, not celibacy. Tennyson makes clear his position on monogamy when Dagonet chides Tristan:

> "For when thou playest that air with Queen Isolt,
> Thou makest broken music with thy bride
> Her daintier namesake down in Brittany."[2]

In view of the allegorical significance of the Last Tournament, the story element is relegated to a position of minor importance. Yet it is interesting to note Tennyson's use of his sources and the influence of modern conditions upon the characters with which we are familiar.

The plot of the Last Tournament is old. Arthur, the king, Lancelot, the trusted warrior, Guenevere, the peerless beauty who brings discord among them, and Mordred, the traitor knight, are personages who have occupied the stage of both epic and romance throughout the ages. Tennyson merely borrowed from his sources, and moulded and polished his material with his own individuality.

The Arthur whom we meet in the Last Tournament is not the King with whom we are familiar. This new Arthur is a preacher rather than a warrior. In the struggles of this ideal Arthur may be seen the conflict between the spirit and the flesh. There is a bearing down of pure and lofty Christian purpose by human passions and

1. Last Tournament l. 315-8
2. Last Tournament l. 263-5

selfishness. Yet though the soul of man is defeated by these adverse influences, it shall triumph in the end, even as did the spirit of Arthur at Avalon.

The Tristan and Iseult tale as presented by Tennyson is scarcely recognizable to those who are familiar with the older versions. Much of the interest centers about the court of Arthur, which is necessary in order to set forth the allegorical significance. The purely narrative story of the early writers of the Tristan legend is transformed into an analytical piece of work which is used as the vehicle for a thesis. Scarcely enough of the original story remains to hold the interest of the reader.

At the very beginning of the Last Tournament, we are told of a rival Round Table which has sprung up in the North and which sends its challenge to the court of Arthur. This message is replete with stinging phrases reviling Arthur's court as a hotbed of hypocritical vice. It is apparent that such an insult must be avenged. Here the reader receives his first shock as Lancelot stands aloft without even offering his services and permits Arthur to lead the expedition. When the manhood of the once noble Lancelot ebbs so low, the condition of the Round Table must indeed be deplorable.

Arthur, with a remnant of followers, proceeds to the castle of the boasting Red Knight and wins a victory, but the glamour and splendor of the old battles is absent. The invaders fight as wolves in the night, not ashamed to take an unfair advantage of an opponent. The Red Knight and his followers were in their halls engaged in drunken revel. With a painful absence of that earlier courtesy, Arthur and his knights enter the castle, trampling and murdering their

drunken, surprised victims, both men and women. But even though the enemy is overcome, victory is worse than defeat. It was true that

> "---all the ways were safe from shore to shore,
> But in the heart of Arthur pain was lord."[1]

He sees the old traditions cast to the winds and realizes that

> "The glory of the Round Table is no more."

While Arthur is engaged upon this inglorious expedition into the North, an even more dismal event occurs at court. This is the occasion of the Last Tournament which has cynically been called the Tournament of the Dead Innocence. This title is derived from the strand of rubies which is the prize for the winner of the tourney. These rubies had been secured by Arthur while on one of his numerous hunting expeditions. While resting from the chase, he has heard a plaintive cry coming from an eagle's nest, and discovered a little child which was naked with the exception of a carcanet of exquisite rubies. Arthur secures the child and places it in the arms of Guenevere, whose early coldness soon turned to tender love. However, in a short time the exposure caused the death of the infant and the rubies were left in the possession of Guenevere as an ever present reminder of this innocent babe. Disturbed by these memories, she gave the rubies to Arthur to be used as a tourney prize.

Thus the title The Tournament of the Dead Innocence was coined, the use of which is truly ironical. Guenevere knew the sin of the court, and was appalled by the corruption which she knew to to exist in Arthur's realm, as is clearly shown when she proposed the tourney to Arthur:

1. Last Tournament l. 263-5

" .....but rosier luck will go
With these rich jewels .....
Perchance, who knows? - the purest of thy knights
May win them for the purest of my maids."[1]

Even the tone of this optimistic speech rings with a forboding note. Guenevere realizes only too well that an evil past cannot be so easily and so quickly turned to good.

Tennyson's ability to use nature in securing appropriate backgrounds is admirably illustrated in his seeting for the Last Tournament. The Last Tournament is held on a dreary, dismal day in late autumn. The lists are wet and soggy, and the decorations which attempt to restore the splendor of former days, are soon dropping. Simultaneously with the sounding trumpet comes heavy peals of thunder and gusts of wind as nature adds her contribution to the desolate situation.

The chivalrous courtesy which added lustre to former tourneys is noticeably absent. The noble Lancelot, who rules the tourney, sees the laws of the tournament broken but does not protest. Lancelot has the heretofore unknown desire to fight with Tristan 'even unto death',and is jealous of the latter's victory. This trait was entirely unknown to the ancient Lancelot, who always considered Tristan as his dearest friend. It is apparent that Tennyson wished to show by this circumstance that Lancelot's loss of the ideal changes his noble nature to one of baseness and selfishness.

Another prominent example of the lack of courtesy at the Last Tournament was at the presentation of the prize. Tristan twits Lancelot with his relations with the Queen, and then takes the prize himself, boastfully proclaiming that his 'queen of beauty was not

1. Last Tournament l. 45-9

was not present'. This is a breach of etiquette which would never have been permitted in the early days.

After the conclusion of the tournament, the spectators silently wend their way homeward with bedraggled finery. With the coming of darkness, however, gaiety again enters the court of Arthur and the disastrous tourney is forgotten. They dance and revel until even Guenevere is amazed and breaks up their sport. Then wroth at Tristan and the lawless jousts, Guenevere goes to her bower, where she gives vent to her anguish.

This materialistic Tristan, with whom Guenevere is so vexed, is truly foreign to the Tristan of Gottfried and Eilhart, although he retains many of the same outward characteristics. As Tristan enters the lists -- tall, straight, and mounted on a huge charger - we can easily identify him with the conqueror of Morholt. The s spectators give him an 'ocean sounding' welcome as he rides on to the field. He is still the knight of the woods as is shown by his forest green costume. Tiny silver deer surrounding a spear, a harp, and a bugle are emblazoned on his shield -- symbols of those fields in which he always excelled. In the combat he is the same indomitable Tristan as of yore. Knight follows knight in meeting defeat before the onrush of this mighty warrior, until he is the acknowledged victor of the Last Tournament, and rides forth to receive the carcanet as his prize to be given to a lady who is not present.

But from this point the character of Tristan changes. We have already seen his unchivalrous attitude upon receiving the prize.

1. Last Tournament l. 275-81

This baser nature is further brought out when Tristan parleys with Dagonet, the fool. Dagonet accuses Tristan of breaking faith with Iseult of Brittany and also with Arthur. Tristan defends his actions in one of the most repulsive speeches of the Idyll. After stating that his oath to the Round Table was made to a mere shell, he sets forth his general principles toward life in those famous lines --

> "Free love -- free field -- we love but while we may.
> The woods are hush'd, their music is no more;
> The leaf is dead, the yearning past away.
> New leaf, new life -- the days of frost are o'er;
> New life, new love, to suit the newer day;
> New loves are sweet as those that went before.
> Free love-- free field-- we love but while we may."[1]

Tristan's attitude toward Arthur is that of a mercenary rebel rather than a loving subject. He twits Dagonet with being true to a King 'smuttier than blasted grain'. This attitude of Tennyson's Tristan is in direct contrast to Malory's Tristan, whose one great passion was to make the Round Table. The Tristan of the Last Tournament stands before Iseult and maintains that he was attracted to the court by its splendor and glitter, and treats the vows made at this time as the "wholesome madness of the hour" which had served their time of usefulness.

Tristan as a lover is shown in an even more unfavorable manner than that in which his relations with the Round Table are described. In this new age Tristan is neither true to his love nor to his friendship. In the older versions much of the beauty of the story was in the presentation of the conflict between love and friendship. Mark was the paternal uncle who loved Tristan as a son and whose love was reciprocated. Although in Malory, Mark's character

1. Last Tournament l. 275-81

degenerates, we find Tristan always true to his friends and companions.

In the Last Tournament, Tristan is true to no one. He even tries to dupe Iseult concerning his last marriage. While en route to Tintagil, Tristan spend the night at one of his old hunting lodges,

> "But could not rest for musing how to smooth
> And sleek his marriage over to the Queen."[1]

He hopes that in far off Tintagil she has not heard of his marriage, in which case he will merely persist in his dual character. The honorable knight who should despise deception does not appear in this incident, or later when he is reminiscent concerning Iseult of Brittany. He says that perhaps the name allured him first, which, if we stopped here, would give us a picture of the forlorn lover who seeks this other maiden of the same name, thereby hoping to secure some solace for his mental anguish. If this were true, we could pity him. The tragedy would be more sincere, for, as Aristotle tells us, true tragedy embraces pity and fear. But in the same sentence all these ideal conditions are ruined. The fickle knight soon loves, not the name alone, but the maid 'who serves him well'. Then in a short time his fancy changes, and he leaves his latest plaything as easily as he had acquired it, and returns to his old love.

When confronted with his duplicity by Iseult, Tristan brazenly admits his guilt and speaks insolently of his wife as patient, prayerful, meek, and paleblooded. Yet despite the guilt of her lover, Iseult clings to him and readily accepts the carcanet of rubies which he has brought from the tournament. As Tristan fastens the blood-red gems around the neck of Iseult, Mark tragically parts the

1. Last Tournament l. 388-90

curtains in the rear and with the exclamation 'Mark's way!, cleaves the lovers to the brain.

Tristan and Iseult appear nowhere so petty and selfish in their love as in the Last Tournament and nowhere do they die so ignobly. There is nothing in their love that is spiritual or that lifts to the imaginative realm. As I have endeavored to show, this is doubtless because of the materialistic age in which the Last Tournament was produced. Tennyson presents only a sensuous love with a hero who boldly says that "love fails when beauty fails". Conscience is hushed by pleasure as the senses possess the soul. All romance is taken out of the story. Tristan and Iseult's great and inevitable love is turned to common intrigue. The aim of man is the union with the infinite Love by loving. If this love is secured in any marked degree, morality is secured. It was this higher goal of love which makes the older Tristan and Iseult story so beautiful. Their love was so great that they tended to love the infinite, thus tending to achieve morality. Tennyson portrays their love as selfish, petty, and base, which makes it not only immoral but even disgusting.

The beautiful faith of the older versions of Tristan and Iseult is absent. The beauty of life and of poetry is faith and the basis of real tragedy is in the breaking of faith. In the Last Tournament there is nothing which even remotely resembles faith. Vows are worthless as we have seen by Tristan's own statements. Iseult expects inconstancy from her lover. There is neither beauty nor tragedy when broken faith is a foregone conclusion.

Doubtless this situation was necessary in order to present the ethical significance which Tennyson wished to weave into his work. Yet the reader who loves the Tristan and Iseult story cannot refrain from wishing that Tennyson had elected to describe some other selection from the myriad of love stories to be found in Arthurian tradition, rather than the old legend of Tristan and Iseult.

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